

## Distortion

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## Distortion

by [skylightsparkle](#)

### Summary

Legends whisper of a world that is a shadowed, distorted mirror of our own. Should harm come to this world, the consequences to our world would be dire. Time and space aren't the only things on a direct collision course, but how a small little pokemon fits into all of this is a mystery. A very annoying one, if you ask Ash Ketchum.

Sequel to Between Time and Space.

AU novelization of Giratina and the Sky Warrior.

## How It Begins



Kneeling on the ground, a teenager girl with long, dusty brown hair stared at a plant in the palm of her hand. A frown appeared on her face, dusty eyes that matched her hair narrowing with frustration. She groaned and slapped her hand to the ground, crushing the plant in the process. “No, it's not the right one! Either the crazy old coot gave us the wrong spot, or something is seriously wrong and they're all gone!” She flopped back dramatically, letting her hat flop off.

“Esp?” The pale purple form of her Espeon sat beside her head, looking down at her with amusement.

“Don't give me that look, we've been out here all day. I'm allowed to be annoyed.” She sighed and pushed herself up, taking in the scenery around it. It was truly beautiful, with a bright blue sky, luscious green plants, a calm, mirror-like river, and high, swooping mountains in the background. If she had an artistic bone in her body, she'd probably love to paint this place.

She was never like that though, which was strange, considering where she came from. Then again, her family was anything but ordinary.

“Esp!” She looked over as her pokemon stood up, dark purple eyes narrowing.

“What's wrong?” She asked, twisting around so that she was on her knees instead.

Espeon's fur stood on end, and it started to shake and hiss angrily.

She was about to repeat her question when a blast of light momentarily blinded her. She cried out, covering her face as the wind whipped her hair behind her and blew her hat into a nearby tree.

Slowly, she opened her eyes again, allowing them to adjust to the dimming light. The scene before her was so bizarre though, that all she could do was gape in shock. It looked the air hovering above the water had been ripped open by a glowing portal of sorts.

“Min!” A high, voice cried out as a small thing flew out of the portal, splashing into the water. She wanted to go see what it was, but a frightening roar from the rip in the air stopped her from moving. A second later, a much larger pokemon tried to fly out of it.

Her mouth fell open again at the sight of the creature. She hadn't been in Sinnoh long, but she knew that she was looking at some sort of legendary pokemon. What else could it be? Despite knowing that, she had no idea exactly what she was looking at.

“Es espeon!” The pokemon cried out as the legendary was suddenly pulled back inside of the rift, and all she could do was stare in horror, wondering what could possibly do that to a legendary pokemon? Shaking her head a bit, she realized that it was a very stupid thought. Only a legendary pokemon could harass a legendary pokemon like that.

A high pitched, bone chilling roar, echoed through the air. A moment later, the legendary flew through the opening, a blue glow surrounding its body as it flew up into the sky and vanished. The portal sealed, and everything went quiet.

“What was—?” Her question was cut off as a whirlwind blasted up from the water, creating a hole that definitely shouldn't have been there. The same screeching from before could be heard, followed by banging and flashes of light, but then the rift in the water slowly vanished.

She waited a moment before slowly approaching, holding her fist to her chest. Nothing else happened, and all she could do was stare. “What the hell just happened?” She didn't like being confused about anything, but there was absolutely no way to get an answer about what just happened.

“Or maybe...” she trailed off, looking down the river. The pokemon that fell out before the legendary must have been whisked away by the water, but it had answers about what just happened.

Determination rushed through her as she said, “Alright. Lets go, Espeon! We're going to find that pokemon!”

...

“I'm going to catch one of those!”

Ash Ketchum let his head lull to the side to look over at the teenage girl sitting beside him on the wooden dock. Her brow was furrowed, sea-green eyes narrowed, her teeth digging into her lip as she slowly and carefully started using her fishing pole to reel in the line.

He shook his head, his messy, raven hair being held in place only by the cap that was turned backwards, his bright brown eyes sparkling with mirth and amusement when he realized what she was talking about.

“Mist,” he spoke to her slowly as he shifted his own fishing pole in his arms. “You're not going to catch a Wingull with that.” Not that they managed to catch anything at all that day. It was nearing noon, but they had already been in that spot for a while now. The townsfolk said that the best time to try and find some hard-to-catch water pokemon was bright and early. Needless to say, in her quest to becoming a Water Pokemon Master, Misty jumped on the opportunity, dragging her very sleepy boyfriend with her.

She glared at him fiercely and said, “I know that!” At her raised voice, the pokemon that she was eyeing all flew to the sky. She groaned and flopped back. “Look what you did now!”

“Don't blame me. I didn't want to wake up early but nooo you had to drag me out of my nice warm bed. I get up early for training but you're ridiculous! Even Ria didn't want to be up early and she's a bundle of energy,” Ash pointed out, referring to his smaller than average Riolu, a female he

nicknamed Ria.

“Well, you want to be a Pokemon Master, you should jump at the opportunity to see new pokemon whenever you can.” Her face faltered when he raised an eyebrow at her. She groaned and lightly slapped his arm. “Fine, fine, I know you do. What about spending quality time with your girlfriend that you rarely see?”

“Well,” He dragged out the L sound. “You are going to be here for a little while longer, but we might not get many more days to sleep in warm beds.”

Misty laughed at him. “You're impossible. Putting comfort before me.”

“Always,” he joked, stretching out and accidentally nudging the small creature that was napping behind them.

“Pi pikachu pi pika pi” a yellow creature said from behind him, looking every bit annoyed at being woken up yet again.

“Nope, you couldn't stay with Ria and sleep. Water pokemon would be no problem for you to handle,” Ash told his first ever pokemon, petting his smooth fur and then scratching behind his head.

“Chaa,” Pikachu cooed, eyes closing with delight.

“So I'm forgiven?”

“Pikachu pika pi pika.”

“Only if I get you ketchup,” Ash shook his head. “Spoiled.”

“Pi.”

Ash's attention was drawn away from Pikachu, back to Misty when he saw her yawn. An amused smile appeared on his face, and she looked at him sheepishly.

“Maybe we should go see what Brock and Dawn are up to.” Misty pointed above them, where a set of stone stairs led to a park that overlooked the water. Their other two friends showed up not too long ago with the rest of the pokemon, and started setting everything up for an outdoor brunch.

“There's no pokemon around here right now.”

“We can always leave the poles here,” Ash pointed out to her. “We'll just be up there and we'll be able to hear if anything gets caught.”

Misty thought about that for a moment. Ash knew that she would normally protest that, since leaving fishing poles out and straying too far from them could lead to really hurting the pokemon on the end of the line, but they really weren't going far. He wouldn't have suggested it if he thought something was going to get hurt.

“Alright.”

They secured Misty's fishing pole, the better of the two, so that it wouldn't just get dragged into the water, both agreeing that there was no need for two of them. Pikachu led the way up the granite steps, eagerly running towards a water fountain that was there.

Ash looked over at his pokemon, watching as he spoke to Piplup quickly. Piplup was Dawn's

starter pokemon, and in his opinion, it was spoiled rotten. Not that he didn't spoil his too, but that Piplup was something else. The fountain that was there had a place to drink from, and faucet to let water run over a pokemon. That's where the little water-type was now, Dawn cheerfully splashing it.

“Something smells good, Brock,” Misty said to their oldest friend, who was standing over a grill that he normally carried with him. Though the sheer amount of stuff trainers seemed to carry with them seemed utterly impossible, most bags were made with slightly similar technology that pokeballs had, fitting much more in them than it might seem by shrinking everything that wasn't biological down.

Ash had no idea how it worked, he was just glad that it did, because that meant that Brock could carry around everything that he needed to make amazing food even on the road. It also meant that he could hide the plethora of underwear that his mother shoved in his bag every time he went home. It was one thing to have enough, but he really thought that his mother had issues that way. It wasn't like he never washed anything. The women he knew were completely insane.

“Ri riolu ri!” Ria spoke up from where she was sitting on the table. She waved at Ash when he looked at her, but then turned her attention to the pancakes that Brock was making. His little pokemon really enjoyed her food.

“Yeah yeah, you little glutton,” Ash joked as he picked her up, moving her out of the way so that Brock could put the pancakes on the picnic table. “Look at you, all dirty.”

“Like trainer like pokemon,” Brock spoke up, wielding a spatula in his direction, looking more than just a little ridiculous in his pink apron that he had no issues wearing. “You don't get any either until you wash your hands.”

“I'm not 10, Brock,” Ash rolled his eyes and sighed with exasperation. He knew he had to wash his hands before eating, even if it was just his fingertips that were dirty, the rest covered by his fingerless gloves.

He walked over to the fountain with Ria struggling in his arms, wanting to go back and get her share of the food that Brock had revealed for the pokemon, but he didn't let go of her.

“Poor Ria, look how dirty you are,” Dawn cooed to the little pokemon as Ash put her under the faucet and turned on the water. “I can't believe you let her get so dirty, Ash.”

He frowned at her. “She's been battling more, so she's going to get dirtier. It's not like I roll her around in filth, Dawn.”

Dawn bristled a bit, her dark blue eyes narrowing at him. Misty glanced from one to the other and sighed, shaking her head.

It might have just been from Misty's perspective, but lately, the two of them had been butting heads more for no reason. Almost like a brother and sister who just couldn't seem to see eye to eye.

Misty might not know the reason behind their arguments, but Ash was definitely well aware of his reasons for getting snippy with Dawn. Ria had shown some interest in contests lately, largely because of Buizel. With Dawn, the pokemon participated in contests, but showed a much larger interest in battles, where his Aipom liked contests more. The end result was Dawn trading with him, and both pokemon seemed to prefer where they were now. The problem was that Dawn had been a little more forward with pointing out when Ash's pokemon seemed to prefer contests to battles even since. It was silly of him, because he wouldn't trade Ria, but Dawn really pushed the boundaries when it came to her sometimes.

Needless to say, Brock was glad when Misty arrived a few days ago. She didn't take any of their snarking at each other, which was kind of funny, considering how much she argued with Ash.

Breaking out of his thoughts, Ash realized that all of the other pokemon were going a little crazy over their food, and Ria looked utterly miserable at not being able to do the same. She wasn't squeaky clean, but that was okay. He nodded his head, and she cooed happily, running towards the others. He finished washing his own hands before getting up to get his pokemon organized so that they'd actually eat from their own bowls, not just squabble over it.

Soon all of his pokemon, Pikachu, Riolu, Turtwig, Chimchar, Buizel and Gilgar were munching on Brock's homemade pokemon food. Along with them were: Brock's Sudowoodo, Croagunk and Happiny; Dawn's Piplup, Ambipom, Swinub, Buneary and Pachirisu; and Misty's Azurill, Politoed, Psyduck, Corsola, Lumineon and Spheal (her two newest additions to her team), who were eating from the little pool of water that was put there specifically for water pokemon.

He smiled at the Lumineon, who had been a high-levelled Finneon when he captured it and gave it to Misty. At the time, he claimed it was for some strange holiday in Sinnoh, but Misty saw through his lie and thought it was adorable that he got her something just because he wanted to. It didn't happen all that often, so it both flattered and amused her when it did.

"Watching them is making me hungry," Ash said, earning a laugh from all of his friends. They turned towards the table to sit down and enjoy the pancakes that Brock made for them, but all of them came to a stop when they saw a small, brown ball eating them.

"Hey!" Ash shot forward, stopping at the edge of the table. "You shouldn't just come up and eat someone else's food!"

"What is it?" Dawn asked curiously as she leaned closer to inspect it.

"A pokemon." Brock answered.

Misty sighed at him and mumbled, "You don't say?"

Pikachu and Piplup both abandoned their food, jumping up on the table to look at the pokemon. Pikachu tilted his head and said, "Pi pikachu?" The pokemon ignored him.

Piplup huffed with anger, waving his flightless wings wildly at the pokemon. When it paid him no mind, he grabbed the pancake it was eating and tried to yank it away. The pokemon just quickly chewed through the food, accidentally biting Piplup's hand.

Piplup yelled loudly at the pokemon, who shook its body, sending dust everywhere.

They all covered their faces, coughing a bit and wondering just how much dirt a pokemon could have on it. They couldn't see anything, but Piplup's yells of anger echoed through the air.

"What's it doing?" Ria spoke into Ash's mind as she jumped up on his head, making it there easily. Though she could use telepathy so everyone could hear, the only time she ever did that was when it was just Ash around, or if it was just him and Misty. Some things were better left unknown. "It feels funny."

Ash never got the chance to answer his pokemon as the creature lunged out of the dirt, slamming into his head. It knocked the startled Riolu off of his head, and when Ash turned to try and catch it, the pokemon ended up flying off of his hat and slamming into the stove.

The pokemon, Ria and the grill all crashed into the ground before the machine exploded, dark

fumes rising up into the air.

“Miiiiiiin!” A loud cry could be heard as the smoke started to vanish, and it was only when there was almost none left that they realized the pokemon was sucking it in somehow.

Ash didn't really pay attention to it, swooping down and picking up his small Riolu. She winced a bit when he touched her arm, and Ash concentrated, trying to see if he could sense what was wrong with her. He was pretty sure she didn't have any broken bones, those were easy to pick out, so it was probably just a bruise or a sprain. That was too bad though, there really wasn't much he could do for those.

Anger rushed through him, and he turned to snap at the little pokemon, blinking with surprise as the flower on its head started to glow, the light slowly taking over its whole body. The power pulsing off of it was amazing for something so small, and that was when Ash knew exactly why Ria thought it felt funny.

It was a legendary pokemon.

Without warning, the light exploded outwards, blasting all of them backwards. Ash gasped as he collided with the table, but was quick to scramble up and check on his friends and pokemon. No one particularly seemed worse for wear, the explosion wasn't that bad, but he was at his wit's end with the pokemon already.

“What are those?” Misty asked, pointing at glittering green spores that were flying through the air.

“Who knows, just don't touch them,” Brock groaned as he stood up, cracking his back in the process.

“Pip! Piplup!” Piplup jumped to the ground and after the creature, scolding it angrily. The pokemon tried to slink away, only to run into the rest of their annoyed friends.

“Stop it!” Dawn yelled at them, storming towards the pokemon. She knelt down in front of the pokemon, her harsh tone turning into a quiet, sweet one. “Don't be afraid, I'm not going to hurt you.” Carefully, Dawn reached out, scooping the small pokemon up into her arms.

Ash held Riolu in his arms as he watched Dawn walk towards the fountain with the pokemon. It was scared, he could feel that much, but for once in his life, he felt more annoyed than anything else. Then again, that thing did just appear out of nowhere, eat their food, and hurt his youngest pokemon.

Still, he approached carefully, staring at the pokemon as Dawn started to wash it off. Pikachu jumped up onto his shoulder, sniffing Ria and patting her head a bit, getting a smile out of the small pokemon.

Ash watched as the dirt started to run away, revealing green, leaf-like fur and two bright pink flowers on either side of its head. Misty cooed a bit beside him, because no matter how tough she was, she had a soft spot for adorable pokemon (bugs aside).

The pokemon stretched out before shaking itself off. Ash took a step back, not wanting to get wet, but poor Piplup was hit with the full force of the spray.

Dawn was quick to stand up straight, running back to their bags and grabbing a small, pink dishtowel that was just big enough to wrap around the small pokemon to warm it up.

“There you go,” she said cheerfully. “I bet that feels so much better!”

“That did feel nice,” a soft, feminine voice spoke up. Brock and Misty both gasped, but Ash just stared at it with a blank expression.

“I’ll bet it did,” Dawn replied cheerfully and obviously. A split second later, her mouth fell open and her eyes went wide as she stared at everyone else.

“Though it was a little chilly,” the pokemon added. “And perhaps if you had been the tiniest bit gentler.”

“Did you-?” Dawn couldn’t even get the whole phrase out.

“I heard it,” Brock answered, and Misty nodded her head in agreement.

“Telepathy,” Misty added, narrowing her eyes slightly. “Not many pokemon can use that, and I’ve never even heard of this one before. I think I’d remember an adorable little one with flowers.”

“Legendary,” Ash sighed, and everyone looked at him. “I don’t know what it is, but I’ll eat my hat if it’s not a legendary pokemon.”

The second a legendary pokemon appeared, things tended to spiral out of control, and that was the last thing he wanted.

*Sky*



## A Face From The Past

“You're awfully cute,” Dawn cooed at the pokemon in her arms. “Aren't you?”

“I really am,” it replied happily, pinking its big, green eyes up at her with a smile. “I like you, you're nice.”

“Aww, I like you too.”

Ash rolled his eyes at the two of them and turned his attention back to where Brock was wrapping up Ria's arm after spraying a bit of potion on it. Maybe he coddled the pokemon a little too much, but she really didn't like medicine, cringing away from it. Of course, she could try to heal herself too, but she honestly wasn't that good at it yet. That was okay though, because they were both just learning as they went.

He felt a hand on his shoulder, and looked over at Misty. She nodded her head, and he followed her a bit away from everyone else so that they could talk without anyone interrupting.

“Ria's fine, it was just an accident,” Misty assured him.

“I know,” he sighed. “I just...”

“Just?” she repeated, waiting for him to say something else, but he didn't really know what to say. “Ash?”

He didn't really know how to explain it all. Despite his confidence that he could make his own choices, that he was the one who controlled his own fate, after his talk with Darkrai back in Alamos Town, he found himself looking over his shoulder for the signs that something was going to go out of wack again.

It made him a bit testy and moody. He really didn't like being that way. Ash didn't want to snap at his friends or be wary of everything. He just watched to travel with his friends and continue to be the very best that he could. Weren't there people who were supposed to handle this type of thing?

Right, Pokemon Masters, which he wanted to be. Still, he wasn't one yet, and there were others out there who should have been saving the world, but seemed to leave everything to him.

“It's a legendary, Mist,” he repeated his earlier statement, bright brown eyes staring at her almost helplessly. “You know what happens when legendary pokemon find us – me. I don't...want to be the one to save the world anymore.” His shoulders slumped. “Is that selfish of me?”

“Considering how many times you already did it, I don't think it is,” she shook her head, then smiled at him. “You could be reading too much into it though. Something bad can't happen every single time.”

“Tell them that.”

“Don't interrupt,” she snapped, reaching up and taking his cap off of his head, twisting it around so it was facing the right direction, not backwards like he had been wearing it all morning. “Seriously, if something happens, we'll deal with that then, it could be nothing. What's with you lately? Normally you're so...optimistic.”

“You used to growl at me for that. Not taking things seriously,” Ash replied defensively.

“Don't snap at me, I'm just trying to help.” She folded her arms across her chest and stared at him with narrowed eyes. “And there's a difference between looking on the bright side and being oblivious.”

He glared back for a moment before sighing. “I know, I know. Sorry.” A small smile appeared on his face. “Maybe I just need a hug?”

“Big baby.” Misty mumbled, a small smile appearing on her face as she threw her arms over his shoulders and hugged him tightly. Ash smiled, placing his hands on her back and drawing her closer. His smile faded a bit as he looked over the top of her head and noticed the pokemon staring at them intently.

A few minutes later, she loosened her grip enough so that she could lean back to look at him. “Come on, lets go see if we can find anything about this pokemon. Then we can worry.”

“Alright. Thanks, Mist.”

“Any time.” She winked at him and they both made their way back over to where Dawn, Brock and the pokemon were.

“So, where'd you come from?” Ash asked after a moment, staring at the pokemon curiously. It didn't look like a threat, but he could feel the underlying power of it with his aura. It was strong, very strong.

“From over there.”

He blinked at her and looked around. “Where?”

“I said from over there,” she snapped back, clearly annoyed with him.

His eyes narrowed, and he ignored Pikachu's mumble of 'pikapi' as he snapped, “What do you mean over there? You're not even looking in a specific direction!”

“Ash!” Dawn scolded him, but he didn't even look at her.

“Well,” the pokemon's face flushed and it looked away, “you head a little farther from over here, and then you head over there, and then...”

Ash looked up at Brock, not having a single idea about what was going on.

The young man frowned and handed Ria back to him before moving to the pokemon, putting his hand on it's head. He pulled his hand back a moment later. “It's got a fever.”

“We need to go to the Pokemon Center!” Dawn's big blue eyes looked up at them all pleadingly.

As much as he was wary of the little thing, Ash didn't want anything to happen to it either. He nodded his head and it was almost like that gesture set everyone else in motion.

“You two, run ahead,” Brock instructed Dawn and Misty. “We can't leave our bags here. Ash and I can get them and the pokemon, but there's no time to waste. So go.” With absolutely no hesitation, Dawn and Misty tore off in the direction of the Pokemon Center they were staying at.

Ash and Brock were quick to put all the pokemon back in their pokeballs, move the ruined grill, grab all four bags and then started running in the same direction that Misty and Dawn ran only moments ago.

As they ran, Ash felt something nagging at him at the back of his mind, but he didn't know what it was. What he did know was that he wasn't going to ignore that this time around like he had so many times in the past.

...

Ash leaned against the glass that separated them from the room the pokemon was in. The small pokemon was stretched out on a metal examination bed, a happy Chansey making sure that all of the scanners, thermometers, cameras and who knew what else, was working properly.

He honestly felt bad as he stared at the sleeping pokemon. Here it was, obviously injured, and he was instantly a bit hostile to it. That was the type of person that he couldn't stand, that he never wanted to be. He shouldn't instantly resent a pokemon just because it was a legendary.

"Do you know what it is, Nurse Joy?" Misty's voice, soft with worry for the tiny creature, broke through his thoughts.

"A Shaymin," the woman replied instantly as her bright blue eyes scanned the screen, taking in all the results that appeared after each test.

"Shaymin?" Brock echoed.

"Yes," she nodded her head. "It's known as the Gratitude Pokemon. It's one of the few pokemon classified as Legendary that have been actually documented before, though they're still mysterious little creatures," Nurse Joy explained. "This poor thing looks so exhausted. It must have gone through a horrible ordeal." She frowned a bit as she looked from the screen back to them, pushing her red-rimmed glasses up the bridge of her nose. "She'll need to sleep for a little while longer, but she'll be fine after that."

"She?" Dawn repeated curiously.

"Yes. It's hard to tell, but we do know that male Shaymin have a more orange-coloured flower where females have pink. This one is fairly unique though. I've never seen one documented with this specific colour before." She smiled at them. "Shaymin travel close to our town every few years, but it was decided that there'd be no festival or anything to honour that so nothing would draw attention to them."

"Huh." Ash stared at Shaymin with curious eyes, taking in what not even the high tech equipment could. For something so tiny, it was powerful. If he concentrated long enough, he could see anything's individual aura – not the general pale blueish green that every living thing had, but the underlying colours that spoke volumes about who a person was, and though it was really hard to tell, Ash got the distinct feeling that this Shaymin was a bit different from other ones. He really wished he knew more about this ability and what things meant, but he only found a mention of it in a museum they went through a while back, and tried experimenting a bit himself.

Maybe not knowing things was good for him. He didn't know how hard it should have been or if he actually should have been able to do something, so he just did it. Over thinking usually landed him in bad places anyway.

Dawn said something beside him, though he was completely zoned out and didn't actually hear what it was. She didn't pout or get mad, so he assumed that it wasn't directed at him. What did catch his attention, breaking him out of his musings was when Brock suddenly knelt down on one knee in front of Jenny, holding her hands in his. Ash missed whatever corny thing that his older friend had said to the woman, but he had seen Brock Book of Pickup Lines (he was still blown away that

it was a real thing at all), and figured that it had to be cheesy. He blinked with confusion, looking at a completely exasperated Misty. “Where'd he get those glasses?”

“You always pick up on the big problem, don't you?” she deadpanned, her fingers twitching a bit. There was no need for her to leap forward and grasp Brock by the ear, pulling him away in a way that Ash would forever find hilarious. Croagunk jumped out of his pokeball and hit Brock in the back with his Poison Jab, (with no dangerous toxins in it, of course) just enough to stun Brock long enough to get dragged away. They watched him shudder and fall before his poison-type dragged him away by his foot.

Nurse Joy just stared with a bit of confused horror before looking at them. “Should I check up on him?”

“No, Croagunk doesn't actually hurt him,” Dawn sighed with exasperation.

“Besides, that would just fuel the fire,” Misty shook her head. “He'd be wanting every pretty girl to visit him after Croagunk dragged him away. It's best to just leave it.” She hadn't even travelled with them that long, this was only her third week-long trip to Sinnoh, the first being when all hell broke loose in Alamos Town, the second being an oddly normal week of searching for pokemon, specifically water-types. Still, she knew all about Croagunk's methods of dragging Brock away, taking after both herself and Max.

Nurse Joy still seemed worried, so Ash pushed himself off of the window. Pikachu shifted from where he was sitting on his shoulder, silently staring at Shaymin. The pokemon blinked down at his master with confusion, but Ash just smiled at him. “I'll go check up on him. Make sure he gets back on his feet.”

“Alright,” Nurse Joy sighed with relief. “There are still a few things I need to check up with Shaymin as it is.”

“We can stay, right?” Dawn inquired.

“Of course!”

Ash glanced at the two girls before leaving the room, Pikachu climbing over to his other shoulder. “Pikapi pi pikachu pi pika.”

Ash chuckled at his friend and ran his fingers through Pikachu's soft, short fur. “Yeah, I did want to get away from it for a bit. Felt a little bad, to be honest.” He glanced down at his belt when he felt a pokeball twitch, a warm presence brushing against his mind as it popped open and another small pokemon materialized right in his arms. With silky, mostly blue fur and big red eyes, Ria was an adorable little creature, but there was much, much more to her than that.

“It's okay,” Ria spoke to him cheerfully, her voice that rang through his mind still that of a young girl's. “You didn't do anything bad, no one got hurt. No need to worry.”

Ash laughed at that as he lifted the pokemon up, allowing her to climb onto the shoulder Pikachu vacated moments before. “You need to stop hanging around with Dawn.”

“I just like the pretty sparkles she has.”

He snorted this time. That explained a lot. His pokemon didn't like contests, she liked glitter. He always got the strange ones, didn't he?

“You okay, Brock?” Ash called out to his older friend when he found him slumped against the

ground, a couple people staring at him warily, almost walking into the people coming into the Pokemon Center.

“Just peachy,” Brock grumbled, still unable to move. “Give me a minute.”

Ash shook his head at him as Pikachu jumped down and sniffed Brock's face and patted his hair sympathetically.

“Excuse me? Did someone happen to bring a pokemon here? A small grass type with a flower?” Ash's head snapped up, not just because of the description, but because the voice was very, very familiar. He blinked a couple times, ignoring Ria and Pikachu's curious coos and he turned around, looking towards the reception desk. There was another Nurse Joy working there, this one much younger and obviously newer on the job, but that wasn't who caught his attention.

He stared, openly gaping for a moment as he took in the teenage girl's long, dusty-brown hair, a familiar white and pink hat, cyan tanktop and pink skirt. He shook his head slightly, taking a few steps towards her because he knew she was asking about Shaymin.

“Leaf?”

The girl looked around, her narrow brown eyes, almost the same colour as hair hair, focusing on him before they widened slightly. “Ash?”

They just stared at one another for a moment in clear surprise before speaking at the same time. “What are you doing here?” They both fell silent again until Ash quickly added, “I asked first.”

“You did not!”

“Do too!”

“You're a liar, Ash Ketchum!” She stomped her foot on the floor and glared up at him as she crossed her arms. Her glare vanished after a moment before her face twisted into one of pure confusion. “When did you get taller than me?”

Completely distracted by the question, Ash glanced down at her and then his face lit up with an almost malicious glee. “I am taller than you! Yes! No the shortest anymore!”

She scowled. “Take the little victories. It's all you'll ever get.”

“Wow, that's just mean.” He didn't seem all that bothered by it though.

“Am I missing something?”

Ash looked back at Brock, who was now standing and staring at them with pure confusion, Pikachu and Ria standing in front of him with similar expressions, though for Pikachu, it was more about the conversation than the identity of the girl, since they'd met briefly before.

“Oh, this is Leaf Green,” Ash gestured to her. “Yes, take every opportunity you can to make fun of her name. Oof.” He rubbed the side that she elbowed. “We grew up together in Pallet Town. She, Gary and I were a little group of troublemakers and best friends.”

“Troublemakers,” she repeated with amusement. “That's putting it lightly.” She stepped towards Brock, and despite being quite a bit shorter, it wasn't really noticeable since she held herself with such confidence, holding out her hand. “Nice to meet you. I know who you are – Brock of Pewter City. You were the Gym Leader still when I went through there.” She smiled smugly as he shook

her hand. "I completely owned you with my Bulbasaur."

Ash could tell from Brock's expression that he didn't really remember, and though he knew Leaf's temper was nowhere near the explosive levels that Misty's could be, he was quick to change the subject. Catching up could happen later. "You mentioned something about a grass pokemon with a flower?"

"Yeah," she looked back at him, nodding her head. "I was by the river and...well I don't think you'd believe me. Anyway, Shaymin ended up in the water. I tried to find it but the current was so fast. I hoped that it washed up here somewhere and someone found it."

"You know what kind of pokemon it is," Brock spoke up, stating a fact, though it came out slightly accusingly.

"I didn't hurt it, if that's what you're thinking," she growled back at him, her narrow eyes glaring at him fiercely. "I just...I wanted to make sure it was okay. If it didn't end up here..." She trailed off.

Ash saw the rapids on the way there, and he swore that he still had tiny half-moon scars on his arm where Misty's nails dug into it to keep him away from the water. She claimed that if he fell in (which he probably would), not even she would be able to pull him out, the rapids were that rough. Leaf's worry made sense, and so did Shaymin's exhaustion. That made him feel a little worse for being harsh.

"She's back here," Ash motioned to the hall behind him. "Came scampering to our picnic site and ate everything. Nurse Joy says that she'll be fine. Wanna see?"

Leaf nodded her head, and Ash was about to lead her back when Brock put a hand on his shoulder. "Woah there, buddy. Maybe you should warn Dawn and Misty that you're bringing someone back with you?"

Ash raised an eyebrow at him. "Why would I do that?"

"Pikapi," Pikachu sighed and jumped up onto his shoulder, waving at Leaf, who smiled back.

"Hi there Pikachu. Looks like Ash is still taking care of you, somehow. Oh, what's this pokemon?" She looked honestly confused as Riolu jumped up onto Ash's other shoulder.

"This is Ria, my Riolu," Ash frowned at her. "You don't know what a Riolu is?"

"No, I haven't been in Sinnoh very long," she shook her head, taking out her own pokedex and pointing it at the small pokemon to fill in the information. "I'm here for a reason, and I think Shaymin might be able to help me out." She must have saw his suspicious look, because she waved her hand at his face dismissively. "Professor Oak cleared me to be out here, you can ask him. I'm helping with a research project that he has ongoing, but never has the time to travel for anymore. If I was up to something bad, you'd know." She paused. "Promise on Fuzzy-Flaafy."

Ash laughed loudly, while Brock just looked confused. Fuzzy-Flaafy had been this once-adorable stuffed Flaafy that he, Leaf and Gary shared when they were younger and in day-care. It was almost a sacred toy to them since no one but the three of them were allowed to play with it, and any promises made on Fuzzy-Flaafy were deadly seriously ones that could never be broken.

He just shook his head at his older friend and then nodded to the doors that he came through only moments before. "A few of our friends are waiting down there. Come on."

Ash was always excited to see an old friend again. There were some circumstances that said

otherwise, like his rather vicious rivalry with Gary when they were younger, but, in general, meeting someone that he was friends with after not seeing them for so long always put a bit of a spring into his step.

Plus, it was really nice to see one of his oldest friends.

“Hey!”

Startled, Misty and Dawn both looked in his direction. The two girls had completely different reactions when they spotted Leaf following him. Dawn tilted her head in the same way that he normally did, staring with honest curiosity. Misty on the other hand tensed up and her eyes narrowed a little bit.

“This is the pokemon you were talking about, right?” Ash asked Leaf, motioning into the room.

Her dusty-brown eyes scanned the creature, widening slightly before she nodded her head. “You said it was going to be okay?”

“Nurse Joy thinks so.”

A sigh of relief escaped her lips. “Good.”

Ash was about to say something else when Misty cleared her throat loudly. He looked towards her curiously, and a small part of him realized that he had done something wrong, just from the way her arms were crossed in front of her and she was tapping her foot.

That was usually his first warning to get ready to run.

“Who's this?” Misty asked, nodding towards the brunette.

Ash almost laughed at his own stupidity. Of course, he completely skipped over that. “This is Leaf Green, one of my friends from Pallet Town. Leaf, this is Dawn and Misty.” Leaf cast them a quick glance and nodded her head in recognition, but she largely kept her attention on the slumbering Shaymin as Nurse Joy physically checked the pokemon herself. “Leaf saw what happened to Shaymin.”

“You did?” Dawn instantly latched onto that, taking an eager step towards her. “The poor thing was covered in muck and dust when we found it! Had a fever and everything. What happened to it?”

“It got washed down the rapids,” she explained again. “But...well...what happened before that is more than a little weird. I don't think you'd believe me.” She made a curious sound, and they all turned their attention to the room where Nurse Joy was smiling before walking out.

“It would seem that Shaymin recovered, much, much quicker than I anticipated,” Nurse Joy informed them, not the least bit bothered by the new face in the crowd. “It must have an ability like Synthesis. She'll still need to rest here for the night, but tomorrow she'll be at full strength again.”

“That was...fast,” Ash wasn't quite sure how else to describe it as he glanced towards Misty. He frowned a bit at how tense she seemed to be before poking her arm. “Hey, Shaymin's fine. You heard Nurse Joy.”

“I know Shaymin's fine, I just...” She glared at him fiercely, but that slowly faded at his clueless expression. Her shoulders slumped as a very small smile appeared on her face. “Never mind. Just a stupid thing.”

Ash rolled his eyes, knowing that the redhead could get worked up over almost anything without any sort of warning at all. He was well acquainted with her temper, less so in recent years, but the point still stood. He grabbed her hand in his, squeezing it reassuringly. He wasn't sure what she was annoyed with or what he had done, but he wouldn't bother her about it when she was getting over whatever it was herself.

“Holy Mew!” Ash glanced around at Leaf, who was staring at him with wide eyes, her face slowly morphing from shock to an amusement that made him shudder because it normally meant bad things for him. She had always been the more stoic one when it came to their small group of three from Pallet, but that didn't mean that she was like that all the time. “Your mom said something but I didn't believe it and neither did Gary and – oh I have to tell Gary!” She snorted. “Aww little Ashy-boy has a girlfriend. How cute.” She punched her fist into her other palm. “No, I won't tell Gary. I just want to see his face when he realizes that you got a girlfriend first.”

Ash's cheeks turned pink and his eyes narrowed, though he didn't once let go of his girlfriend's hand. “Shut up, Tiny-Leaf.”

“Tiny-Leaf?” Brock repeated, sounding completely lost.

“Wait, how long have you two known each other?” Dawn asked curiously, turning her attention away from Shaymin for a moment.

“Since we were just little babies,” Leaf said simply. “Gary too. See, my mom and his dad were...friends of sorts. Ash's mom worked with Professor Oak when she was younger so that's how Ash got pulled into our little group -.”

“I got pulled in? Gary and I already knew each other as babies before you were born,” Ash interrupted.

She waved her hand at him. “Details. Now shush, I'm telling a story. Anyway, we were all the same age and our parents had some sort of connection, so we've known each other all our lives. I swear, this guy's like the annoying baby brother I never wanted.”

“I'm older than you.”

Once again she just shrugged. “By a month. Like I said, details.”

“So Ashy-boy and Tiny-Leaf are nicknames you guys made as kids?” Misty piped up, and Ash sent her an almost accusing look. Misty ignored him though. At first, she was wary of Leaf, but the redhead had become very adapt at reading people that she thought were threats very quickly, a bit of a blessing in disguise thanks to Team Rocket (literally). She didn't want to be a jealous girl, but it was still her knee-jerk reaction. Leaf clearly had no interest in Ash, so that instantly cleared her of any fictitious wrong-doing in Misty's eyes. Plus there was so little of Ash's pre-pokemon childhood that she knew about, and this girl just happened to know what was on most of those blank pages.

“That's the nice nickname they gave me,” Leaf rolled her eyes. “I was a bit of a chunky child, so they called me Beefy-Leafy.”

Ash suddenly looked down at the floor, as Misty pulled her hand out of his and lightly smacked his shoulder. “Ash!”

“It only happened once!” He defended himself with waving arms. “She cried, and then I cried, so I never said it again! It was all Gary after that!”

Leaf snickered at him, clearly amused. “My Arceus, you're whipped.” Her eyes shifted to Misty.



“He's telling the truth though. Water works and all. Ash came up with Tiny-Leaf after that. Mom thought it was cute so it stuck. Though Gare-bear still calls me Beefy-Leafy sometimes just to piss me off. It's no big deal though.”

Ash chuckled a bit and shook his head. “Yeah, well, that's Gary.”

“Pallet Town's resident jerk,” she agreed, a nostalgic smile appearing on her face.

Wanting to get off of the topic of the horrible name he had a hand in creating when he was little (in retrospect, he had been a pretty big brat half of the time back then), Ash looked back at Shaymin before snapping his fingers. “Why don't you show us where you first saw Shaymin and tell us exactly what happened?”

“You sure you want to?” It was Brock who asked him, his tone a bit skeptical. It took Ash a moment to realize why. He was trying to avoid any sort of confrontation with legendary pokemon, but this was almost like going along with another crazy adventure. Really though, as cranky as he'd been lately, Ash really wanted to know what happened. It was a twisted combination of his own endless curiosity and a need to help any pokemon that he came across.

“Yeah. She'll be fine here with Nurse Joy. What do you guys say?” Ash directed that question at Dawn and Misty, both who had been relatively quiet.

Misty nodded her head, but Dawn hesitated. She sighed and faced him. “I guess I'd like to see if there's anything there. The poor little thing was so dirty and beat up.”

They looked at Brock, who shrugged. “If you guys are up for it. I am too.”

“Alright.” Ash faced Leaf, pumping his fist, both Pikachu and Ria mocking the pose. “Lead the way!”

...

The trek was surprisingly quick, considering they were going uphill most of the way. There were a variety of waterfalls and rapids in the river, and Misty made a big show of making sure that Ash was nowhere near it, claiming that he'd somehow end up tumbling head first into it.

He wished he could argue with her, but something out there really hated him and that probably would end up happening. He'd certainly get a first hand look at the beating Shaymin took though.

“So Professor Oak asked you to come here?” Dawn asked Leaf, curious about this newcomer that she never heard of before. When she met May and Misty the first time, she felt slightly overwhelmed at first just from the moments when she didn't understand inside jokes and small things like that, but now all of them (except for Ash) were on the same playing field with this girl.

Leaf hummed a bit and nodded her head, glancing at the younger girl briefly. “I was cataloguing poisons and antidotes for him to update the pokedex. There were specific things that he asked me to find, and Sinnoh's my last stop before I go back home.”

“Poisons?” Brock repeated with disbelief. “Studying those and antidotes can be very dangerous. He might have a lot of faith in you.”

Leaf was about to answer but Ash's chuckle cut her off. “Leaf was always a hard worker. Gary was always smarter than the rest of us so he just coasted without a problem, and I was a little goober who got distracted by shiny things. She used to get so caught up in things that we had to remind her to eat and sleep sometimes. So I'm not surprised.”

She laughed and shook her head, “You were a hard worker when you wanted to be. You got picked to leave Pallet when you were ten like us.”

“And Joey.”

“And Joey,” she agreed with a sigh. “I’d say ‘that poor Charmander’ but I’m pretty sure whoever it was traded too was better.”

“Joey?” Misty questioned them.

“Yeah, he left Pallet the same day we did,” Ash made a face. “He uh, well he lost it a bit. Trains only Rattatas now. Like, not even Raticates, just Rattatas.”

“That’s...uhh...” Misty didn’t seem to know what to say about that. She coughed and said, “So that means you must have got Bulbasaur, right, Leaf?”

For the first time, she looked like she was about to gush. Leaf nodded enthusiastically. “You bet I did! Venusaur is my best friend. He’s been helping me a lot with this, actually.” She suddenly came to a stop, staring at a clear pool of water that led to the rough waterfalls and rapids. “This is where I was when Shaymin appeared.”

Ash didn’t actually need her to tell him that they were in the right spot. He could feel some sort of strange aura pulsing from the middle of the air, though it was fading a bit. He honestly didn’t know what to make of it, but as he closed his eyes, he could almost see a rip in the air that wasn’t there to the naked eye.

“What do you mean, appeared?” Brock asked her.

“I mean something like a portal appeared over the water and she flew out, along with something else.” Leaf shook her head as she looked up towards the sky. “It was so strange, I’ve never seen anything like it before. It was big, blue, with four legs and a long neck. It must have been a legendary pokemon from this region.”

Ash didn’t need to hear the description either as he picked up on a fading, familiar aura seconds before Leaf started describing the pokemon. He felt his stomach drop and his heart start beating wildly as he realized exactly what it was that she saw.

“Dialga.”

*Sky*

## Against The Tide

*“You-”*

*Eyes flashed open, revealing vibrant red irises against contrasting green eyes.*

*“-must-”*

*An angry cry that seemed to echo from everything and nothing at the same time pulsed through the air.*

*“-understand,-”*

*The blue of the sky twisted, turning into a vicious orange.*

*“-this-”*

*A large form appeared, silhouetted against the fiery sky, fur flowing though there was no wind.*

*“-is-”*

*A second cry arced through the air, and the silhouette settled against jagged rocks, glaring down at the destruction below it.*

*“-just-”*

*The creature rose to the sky again, orbs glowing around it in a perfect circle.*

*“-the-”*

*There was a flash of white light, and then, everything was gone.*

*“-beginning.”*

*The world had turned to ash.*

...

Ash gasped, his eyes snapping open though he didn't actually jerk up in his sleep. He blinked a couple times, taking deep breaths as his eyes adjusted to the light in the room, and he could clearly see that everything was fine. He couldn't see Brock, who was on the bunk above him, but some slight shifting as the older boy very, very slowly started to come out of his sleep let Ash know that he was fine. Across from him was another set of bunks, Dawn sleeping on the bottom one, staring at a pillow with Piplup, while Misty was on the top cuddling with Azurill.

Rolling over, he let out a sigh of relief when he saw Pikachu curled up at the end of the bed by his feet, while Ria was bundled in the blankets that she managed to steal away from Ash (apparently she was a blanket thief, who knew?). They were all okay, and that's what mattered to him.

He rolled again, looking towards the clock in the room and almost groaning. It was far too early for a decent human to be awake, but far too late to actually go back to sleep. Making sure not to disturb his pokemon, Ash slipped out of the bed and grabbed his things, heading to the attached bathroom to get ready for the day.

Hey, at least he'd get as much breakfast as he wanted, not rushing in at the last minute and taking whatever was left. It was a bit strange that everyone was still asleep when he left though. Brock was always awake before him, as was Misty when she was visiting them (he knew for a fact that she could sleep until noon if she was at home and didn't have to run the gym).

Ash was a big boy though, he didn't need his friends or pokemon to accompany him to get food. There were a few other trainers up at the complimentary buffet breakfast that was always held at any Pokemon Center, and as he got his food, one caught his eye.

Quickly grabbing something to drink, Ash made his way to the table Leaf was sitting at, leaning over a tablet of some sort and staring at it with the utmost fascination. It may have been childish, but he grinned when she jumped as he set his plate roughly on the table.

Ignoring the glare from her dusty-brown eyes, Ash sat across from her and started picking at his food. "Still an early riser?"

"Still a bottomless pit?"

He just flashed her a smile before stuffing more food in his mouth and looking at her tablet curiously.

"I'm cataloguing the abundance of different types of plant life that is commonly used to cure poisons from pokemon," she explained to him, tapping on a picture of a Beedrill. "You remember this guy, right?"

He swallowed his food. "Who doesn't?"

"Right, well everyone knows that Beebell plants cure the poison fairly easily, but it's becoming very, very, hard to find in the wild, probably from over use," she scowled a bit at that. "If people weren't so stupid and gave pokemon the space they deserved, this wouldn't be a problem. I'm here searching to see if I can find the plants Professor Oak has listed, because if I can't while actively looking for a long period of time, trainers can't either, and they can set up warnings in the pokedex entries to bring synthetic medication for it."

"Smart idea," he nodded his head, understanding entirely. "How's the seaweed that cures Tentacool and Tentacruel poison?"

"Still lots of that. Why do you..." Leaf trailed off, shaking her head, her long hair flying around as she did. "Oh right, the poison from those guys almost kills you."

"Don't sound so excited," Ash replied dryly. His severe allergic reaction to the poison from Tentacool and its evolutions was something that he didn't talk about often (or at all), though it was clearly listed as an alert on his pokedex. "It sucks. Misty loves Tentacool, but I don't want to even try and catch one, just in case. She'd kill me if I died trying to get one for her. She can get it herself."

Leaf snorted. "Of course it sucks because you can't get your girlfriend her favourite pokemon, not because you'll pretty much die from the sting." She shook her head again. "I never once thought I'd see this side of you Ketchum."

"You thought I was going to be alone forever?"

"Yup," she popped the P on her lips and nodded. "Alone on a mountain and forever trying and failing to beat Master Red."

Rolling his eyes at her, Ash turned his attention back to his food, quickly eating the rest. “Did Nurse Joy tell you anything about Shaymin?”

She made a face at him for eating with his mouth full. “She's still asleep though she'll probably wake up sooner rather than later.”

Nodding his head, he was quick to chug down his glass of orange juice, standing up again. Leaf glanced at him curiously and asked, “Going back for seconds?”

“Nah. Gonna get some food for my pokemon, then head out for morning training. We always go. Well, never this early but sitting around waiting for Shaymin to wait up would make me antsy and bored. Hey!” He scowled as she piled her dirty plates up on his tray.

“You're going, I'm staying here,” she shrugged, raising an eyebrow as if to challenge him. Ash just rolled his eyes and took the overloaded tray anyway, waving at her as he walked back to his room.

Though he'd like to claim otherwise, Ash wasn't exactly a ninja, but he still tried to be as quiet as he could when sneaking back into the room he shared with his friends. As luck would have it, all of them were still sleeping, so he tip-toed his way over to the bed, putting on his belt with his pokeballs and then gently rousing Pikachu and Ria. Just picking them up ended very badly for him in the past.

It wasn't that he didn't like training with his friends or anything, but the morning was his time with his pokemon and he seriously didn't want anyone else to trail after them.

Stopping by the counter to get some food for his pokemon from Nurse Joy, Ash quickly made his way out of the building. After a little bit of exploring the other morning, he found a small clearing hidden in the trees, and while this would normally be a bit confining for the very hands-on training that he did, it was fine for the morning.

Ash sat on the ground and then tossed his pokeballs high into the air, releasing Turtwig, Chimchar, Buizel and Gilgar. All of the pokemon greeted him happily, taking their share of the food and spreading around the clearing with Pikachu joining them a moment later.

Crossing his legs in front of him, Ash watched silently as Ria sat facing him crossing her legs under her as she ate her food.

'You wanna try making it today, or do you want me to?'

'I'm tired,' she replied, a bit of a whine to her voice.

Ash chuckled and shook his head. He held out a hand and concentrated for a moment, a small sphere materializing just above his open palm. Ria stiffened with excitement as he carefully tossed the ball of energy to her. She held out her paw and it came to a stop before she tossed it back to him. Back and fourth this game of catch the aura went on and on, getting faster until a second sphere was added. Then they started creating small barriers to stop the energy instead of just passing them back and fourth.

It wasn't really a tasking exercise, but neither wanted to hurt the other, so it was also teaching both of them control. Ria, Ash was discovering, was much better with the offensive side of aura, quickly creating spheres, and learning to manipulate the energy around herself to move herself much faster, farther and higher than the average Riolu. Ash could create aura spheres, but they weren't nearly as powerful, and it took a lot of concentration on his part. He was much better at using his abilities to help and protect with barriers and healing, where Ria struggled with that, especially healing.

Neither of them said a word through this sort of training, communicating strictly through this aura bond and telepathy that they had. Ash couldn't actually talk to any of his other pokemon or read minds, he wasn't a psychic, but he could talk to her.

He could – for a lack of a better explanation – project feelings to his pokemon that he bonded with. It was a bit strange, but if he reached out with his aura and touched their own individual ones (everyone had an aura, even if few were able to use it), it still gave them a stronger bond than before. He could feel their emotions even if he couldn't hear the thoughts, and when he focused they could feel his. Using that, they were all learning how to silently communicate while battling. It gave them the edge of surprise.

That morning, everyone was tired, so he didn't push too much, letting everyone but Ria relax. Silently holding out his hand to his youngest pokemon, Ash took off his glove and brought out his pocket knife. Ria whined in protest, her ears flattening as she watched him draw the blade along the top of his arm, creating a shallow cut. He used to do it on the palm of his hand, but there were apparently a lot of nerve endings in the hand, or something like that, and this was a lot less painful even if it still stung.

'You can do it,' Ash encouraged her.

Ria's brow furrowed and she held her paw over his arm, concentrating as she watched small drops of blood drip from his arm. Nothing happened, but he was patient, one of the last things that anyone really associated with him.

Her eyes crossed from the concentration, when a faint glow surrounded the wound. It was really eerie to see the skin close up on its own, easily the most disturbing part of the whole exercise. When Ash healed himself, he kept his hand over the wound until it was better, but seeing Ria do it was strange.

'Good job!' Ash rubbed the top of her head as she slumped down a bit. Pikachu rushed over and looked at his arm before cooing and patting the small pokemon's shoulder. She looked so downhearted that it took her so long to fix up a tiny little cut. Ash frowned a bit at that before creating another tiny aura sphere, catching her attention with it, and then tossing it to her. Ria perked up a little more, moving the energy around in her paws before throwing it back to him.

Their game didn't last long. The other pokemon suddenly turned their attention to something else, and Ash realized that a familiar aura was approaching them. He didn't bother trying to hide the tiny aura sphere though, he didn't even bother turning around.

“There you are,” Misty said to him as she came into the clearing, Azurill held in her arms. Ash spared a glance up at her, watching as she yawned a bit, but didn't even seem remotely interesting in the little aura sphere. She and Brock were getting pretty used to finding him practicing when no one else was around. “Everyone's looking for you. Shaymin's up.”

“That's good.” His voice was genuine, because all reservations aside, he'd never wish harm on a pokemon. He shook his hand when Ria tossed the aura sphere a little too hard and it exploded on his skin, but didn't actually do any damage beyond a brief pins-and-needles feeling. “I guess that's enough practice for today. You did good.”

He jumped to his feet and looked back at his other pokemon, checking to make sure that they all had something to eat before bringing them back into their pokeballs. With Pikachu on one shoulder and Ria on the other, he turned back to Misty and said, “Let's get this over with.”

“Drama queen,” Misty rolled her eyes and Azurill laughed.

“You say that now, but just watch. We're going to get there and Shaymin's going to predict the end of the world or something!”

...

Ash and Misty got back just in time to see Chansey wheeling out a relatively confused-looking Shaymin. Dawn was leaning close, staring at the small creature curiously, while Leaf hovered behind them a bit, her face a little more analytical. Ash had no idea where Brock was, but figured that he'd show up sooner rather than later, especially since Nurse Joy was already there.

Shaymin looked around at all of them one at a time before asking, “Where am I?”

“At the Pokemon Center,” Dawn supplied happily as she hugged Piplup to her chest before setting him on the mattress beside Shaymin. She ran around the bed and leaned down, throwing out her arms as she said, “Nurse Joy treated you, and now you're all better.”

Shaymin scratched at her ear before staring at Dawn, and Ash couldn't remember the last time he has seen a pokemon look so skeptical. “Oh please. I never need healing! But I do get hungry.” She shifted, scratching at her flower instead.

“Isn't she supposed to be the gratitude pokemon?” Ash asked, putting his hands on his hips. “Cause that sure doesn't sound like gratitude to me.”

The blue-haired girl rolled her eyes at him and turned her attention back to Shaymin, completely ignoring what he just said. “Well, you sound a lot better to me. My name's Dawn, and that's my partner, Piplup!”

Shaymin glanced at the pokemon, looking entirely too unimpressed as Piplup tried to puff up his chest but ended up falling to back onto the mattress.

Dawn just laughed happily, chattering on to the small pokemon. Ash glanced over towards Leaf, who shuffled towards them and folded her arms in front of her. “She's...a chatter box...isn't she? Kind of reminds me of you when you were younger and would get super excited about something.”

“That's one way to put it,” Ash shrugged as he watched the girl in question hold up some food. “Means well though.”

Shaymin chewed on the homemade poffin and said, “It's a little dry.”

“Rude,” Misty scowled, though Dawn didn't really seem to mind.

Ash had to admit, he was a little bit curious about the creature. He took a couple steps forward, and Shaymin turned to face him, her green eyes meeting his brown ones. She finished chewing her food and then burped loudly, spewing smoke in his face.

He stumbled back with a scowl, waving his hand in the air. “Is it gonna blow up again?”

Brock chose that moment to appear seemingly out of nowhere, crossing his arms and looking down at Shaymin thoughtfully, but not before casting a glance over his shoulder at Nurse Joy. “Well, she did breath in smoke from our stove.”

“Oh,” Nurse Joy stood up. “That's called Seed Flare.”

“Seed Flare?” Ash repeated, fairly certain that he never heard of that attack before. He looked at

Brock. "Where'd you come from?" He just pointed to the door and that was that.

"When a Shaymin breathes in polluted air, it purifies it in its body, separating it into light and water," Leaf answered. Ash cast a glance over his shoulder and saw that she was reading out of her pokedex. Right, Shaymin was probably the legendary pokemon they knew the most about. He forgot about that little tidbit.

Pikachu scampered over onto the bed that Shaymin and Piplup were on, Ria and Azurill following suit, all curious about this new creature.

Dawn's face lit up excitedly and she said, "Shaymin, you're really something, aren't you?!"

"I am, aren't I?" Ash caught Misty's attention, making a face at the pokemon's arrogance. She rolled her eyes and shook her head. Pikachu just sighed.

"There is one thing though," Nurse Joy spoke up, catching their attention. Her blue eyes were serious as she pushed her glasses up the ridge of her nose, turning back to her computer. "There was a Shaymin that used Seed Flare before. When it inhaled toxic air from a nearby power plant, it destroyed an entire forest." She brought up images of the damage on the screen, and all of them were blown away by the size of the crater and all of the shattered trees. "The Pokemon League even got involved in this, it was such a huge explosion. Not every Shaymin has the power to do this though. Something like this probably wouldn't have happened to you, but it's still lucky that your stove had very little toxicity."

"Woah," Ash looked at the damage. It was hard to believe that something so small could cause something like that.

Shaymin turned her head up with a smug smile. "I would say you owe me a big thank you."

"What?" he narrowed his eyes at the pokemon. "We don't owe you anything. We're the ones who brought you here."

"That was your idea," she argued back with a yawn. Ash could feel the pokemon's exhaustion, and not in a physical way. More like she was tired of dealing with him.

"You know," Leaf spoke up, "I'm curious about how you got here." Her narrow brown eyes were focused solely on the pokemon.

"Huh, I shouldn't be here, should I?" the pokemon wondered before shaking her head. "I was tossed all over the place. It was horrible."

"That doesn't answer my question," Leaf grumbled, folding her arms in front of her, though she was ignored.

"That's how you got covered by all that dirt," Brock noted.

"Yeah." Shaymin suddenly snapped around to face Ash, her eyes narrowing. "So that's why you're going to take me to the Flower Garden, right?"

There it was. That knowing look in her eyes that was positively drilling into his own. His shoulders tensed and he shifted back just slightly. Ria looked up at him, glanced at Shaymin, before leaping up onto his shoulder, her red eyes regarding Shaymin warily.

"No." Every single one of his friends looked at him with surprise, even Misty and Leaf. The former knew why he had reservations, and the latter he hadn't seen in years, but both were just as stunned



as Dawn and Brock.

Shaymin's eyes narrowed and she scowled at him. "Look here! I have to go to the Flower Garden and that's that!"

Ash was going to argue back, despite the fact that Misty tugged at his sleeve to try and draw his attention away from the pokemon. Nurse Joy obviously didn't catch onto the tension that befell them, happily chiming in. "For the Flower Bearing, of course!"

"The Flower Bearing?" Dawn asked, glancing over her shoulder at Leaf, who jerked with surprise, eyes going wide. She stared for a moment before turning her attention back to Nurse Joy.

"I've never heard of it," Misty spoke up, adjusting Azurill in her arms. Over all, she didn't really have much to add to the conversation so she chose to keep quiet, warily waiting for the moment when she'd have to no doubt stop her boyfriend from running his mouth too much.

"It's a custom for Shaymin," Nurse Joy explained. "Once a year all of the Shaymin gather together in the Flower Garden and then migrate together. Where they stop becomes a new garden."

"I'm going to fly to a new flower garden," the pokemon spoke, entirely too pleased with itself.

"You can actually fly?" Ash repeated, though his attention was distracted by the partially opened door. It took every ounce of willpower he had not to face-palm, because Team Rocket was out there and this was looking more and more like one of those situations that he really, really wanted to avoid. They were always around somewhere when everything went to hell, even if they themselves rarely ever caused it.

"Don't tell me you can't."

"Of course I can't," he scowled at her and held up his arms to show that he didn't have wings. Though maybe he could find a way to shut her up with aura. That must have been possible some how.

"What a shame," Shaymin quipped sarcastically before jumping up at him. Ria yelped with surprise, hopping onto Misty's shoulder instead, while Shaymin landed on Ash's head. "Now take me to the Flower Garden!"

"Did you not hear me? I said no. So get off!" Never before could Ash remember wanting to throw a pokemon so much. Well, there was that one time he tried to punch Mewtwo, but that was a whole other story. "We don't even know where it is!"

She didn't leave. With a strength that surprised him, she jerked his head to the right roughly, and he felt a twinge of pain in his neck from the harsh movement. "It's that way."

"I thought you could fly. If you know where to go, just go!"

"Well I can't do it right now, so you need to take me. You have to! You don't have a choice."

That struck something unpleasant in Ash. He was so close to ripping his hat off of his head and yelling at the creature to get across the point that he wasn't going to some garden just because some legendary pokemon thought he was required to be her escort.

He didn't even get the snarl out of his mouth before Dawn hopped over, innocent blue eyes shining happily. "No need to worry, we'll all help you get there!"

“Did you not just hear me? No, we won't!” It wasn't Dawn's fault, she had no idea why he was so against helping a seemingly innocent, but arrogant, pokemon. The only one that really knew was Misty, though Brock probably had a bit of an idea why Ash was so against it.

“Ash Ketchum!” Dawn stomped her foot on the ground and put her hands on her hips, glaring at him. “We are going to help this pokemon and that's that!”

Ash knew that he was acting out a little bit, being irrational, but there was literally no reason he could think of that Shaymin needed their help outside of being a selfish, arrogant little thing. She was physically fine, she knew where she was going, and apparently she made the trip every single year so she was able too. Maybe if she was hurt and couldn't get there on her own it would be different, but she was perfectly able to go on her own. He took a calming breath, because screaming at Dawn would accomplish absolutely nothing. Sometimes he had to actively remind himself that he was the older one and couldn't just yell back at her like he used to with Misty (or even Leaf and Gary) when they were young. He stared at her sternly and said, “She has two legs. She's a pokemon. She knows where she's going. We don't have to stop and help every little pokemon that looks our way.”

“Are you seriously saying that with a straight face?” The blue eyed girl shook her head, not about to back down just yet. Brock looked like he wanted to say something, but wisely chose to stay out of it. “You used to help everything you stumbled on! Ever since Alamos Town, you've just been a—a selfish jerk! You know we have to help her! It's our—our obligation!”

“What do you know about anything like that? You just walk around acting like you know everything about being a trainer while thinking about how to make your pokemon pretty!”

“Ash!” Misty jabbed his side, and Brock looked entirely too unimpressed now. The red-head set Azurill down and took Shaymin off of Ash's head. “Everyone needs to calm down! Both of you have good points.”

“He doesn't,” Shaymin said in regards to Ash. “He sounds pretty stupid to me.”

“You aren't helping at all,” Misty scolded the pokemon gently. She could feel the 10-year-old versions of herself screaming to just grab everyone, slam them into a chair and beat them until they could just agree on something, but she wasn't that 10-year-old anymore, so she wouldn't. She knew why Ash was so against getting pulled into taking Shaymin anywhere, because while it seemed innocent, so did taking an invitation to see the world's greatest pokemon master, or becoming the chosen one for a festival. On the other hand, he was being a complete jerk about it instead of the mature person that she knew he could be. Though admittedly, he could have been acting a lot worse.

She should have spoke up when there was a lull in the conversation, because while she got lost in her thoughts on how to handle the situation, Ash and Dawn started snipping at one another again. Seriously, they were just like siblings sometimes. She groaned with annoyance and looked at Brock almost pleadingly. He sighed and then forcefully got in between the two and separating them.

Shaymin shifted in Misty's arms, looking up at her. She glanced back down and couldn't help but notice the thoughtful expression on the pokemon's face. She was about to ask her what she wanted, but the pokemon looked away, whipping her head so fast that pollen flew from her fur.

Misty coughed on it, waving it away and then sighing.

“I'll take her then.”

Ash and Dawn instantly stopped arguing and looked towards Leaf, who stepped forward after watching the altercation in silence.

“Huh?” That was the only intelligent response Ash could get out.

“I’ll take her to the Flower Garden,” Leaf repeated. “It’s no big deal. I was going to be looking around for different type of plants anyway, so it’s not out of my way.”

“I wanna go too!” Dawn spoke up eagerly, not caring that she was inviting herself to go along with a person that she just met. “I’d love to see this Flower Garden.” It was so painfully obvious that she was already attached to Shaymin, that it almost made Ash feel ashamed of how he acted towards her. It reminded him a bit of Max with Jirachi or May with Manaphy, but to a lesser extent.

“I don’t know, Dawn,” Brock told her, sounding a little bit wary as he subtly glanced over at Leaf.

“Well, you can come too,” the youngest of the group said it as if it was obvious. “Besides, we’re just going to a garden, not the end of the world. Cranky-pants can stay here.” She motioned to Ash, looking at him as if he was a small, misbehaving child.

Brock hesitated. “Well, if Leaf doesn’t mind.”

“It’s no big deal.” She shrugged, sounding like she could care less if they went with her or not. Brock and Dawn might not know Leaf, but Ash did, and he knew that was just how she always tried to portray herself. She wasn’t exactly a people-person, but she wasn’t going to shove them away if they were offering help.

“Great!” Dawn scooped Shaymin up out of Misty’s arms and smiled at her. “You wanna come, Mist?”

Misty’s eyes shifted towards Ash for a moment before she shook her head. “No. Well, I might catch up, but I’m going to stay with Ash. You have Brock with you, you’ll be fine.”

Dawn pouted a bit but nodded her head and then looked at Shaymin. “Come on, we’ll get you home in no time.”

“Yeah, but—,” Shaymin cut herself off, blinking up at Ash over Dawn’s shoulder. He could almost hear the rest of her sentence in his head, ‘it has to be him because he has no choice and has to do what we want him to’. He folded his arms in front of him and glowered. “Fine. Lets go now.”

Misty held Shaymin while Brock, Dawn and Leaf got their bags. Dawn quickly took Shaymin into her arms as Leaf looked over the map on her pokegear, while Brock came over to Ash.

“I don’t know what the issue is, not really,” the young man said to his friend, sounding more exhausted than patronizing, “but you need to actually deal with it, Ash, not just let it fester. It’s not you, and you know it.”

Ash was all riled up and wanted to argue, but he didn’t. His shoulders slumped down because he knew Brock was right. He sighed and nodded his head.

“Don’t worry, I’ll make sure everything’s fine here,” Misty nodded her head confidently. “I’ll whip him back into shape.”

“Not literally,” Brock warned her, sounding more amused than anything else.

“Brock?” Ash spoke up suddenly. “Leaf might seem a bit...mean at times but she’s not a bad

person. I know you're iffy cause you don't know her, but you don't have to trust her. Just trust me.”

“I'll hold you to that.”

“Brock, come on!” Dawn called out to him from the front door of the Pokemon Center, standing beside Leaf.

“Be good,” he said to Ash and Misty before turning and following the two girls out the door.

They stood in silence, watching the other three walk away through the glass doors. Misty broke the stillness first, grabbing Ash's arm and tugging him over to one of the small couches. She forced him to sit and just stared at him as Pikachu, Ria and Azurill squished together beside her.

“I'm sorry,” he finally blurted out. “I don't know what...I know I was being a jerk.” A frustrated huff escaped his lips. “I just...you know why.”

“I do know why,” she nodded her head, fiddling with the hood of her yellow tanktop. “I get that, I really do. I know Dawn doesn't because she has no idea, and Brock only knows pieces of everything, but Ash, he's right. This really isn't you. Even when we were 10 and you were an actual jerk of a child, you wouldn't have snapped so much.”

“I just don't know what to do.”

“Neither do I,” she admitted, hating to see how downtrodden he was, especially since she didn't have the answer as to what he should do. “Well, I can help you with step one: controlling your temper. I am good at it. Now.”

A weak smile made its way onto his face and Ash shook his head. “It's not all my fault. You heard how much of a jerk Shaymin was.”

“Oh I know, I wanted to smack it too.” She slapped her hands together, like she was imagining herself doing just that. “Reminded me of my sisters on their bad days,” Misty shook her head. “Being all snooty, burping in your face, throwing pollen at you.”

“Your sisters have some interesting bad days.”

Misty rolled her eyes and smacked his arm lightly. Ash didn't mind though, he was already feeling the tiniest bit better. She was right, he did overreact and was a jerk, but it wasn't completely unjustified. He'd just blame it all on being a teenager.

He was about to say something else to her when a cold feeling rushed down his spine. There was confusion, desperation, anger and hatred all mingling together in a very unpleasant entity that was there but not there at the same time. He sat up straight and looked at the door with narrowed eyes, ignoring Pikachu and Azurill's curious coos as Ria did the same thing.

“Ash?”

“Something's following them.” He jumped up, grabbing his green pack that Brock brought from the room earlier. Pikachu and Ria ran along side him, while Misty scooped up her own bag and called Azurill back into her pokeball. She stumbled forward a bit, before regaining her footing and running after him. Ash was glad that Misty didn't question his sudden shift in motives. She knew him too well to even bother.

Shaymin wanting an escort was one thing, but something very unpleasant that was stalking his friends was something else entirely.

*Sky*

## The Reverse World

Ash ran as fast as his feet could carry him towards Brock, Dawn and Leaf. Something akin to horror was creeping through him when he realized that the reflections of the sculptures that lined the road were glowing one by one, with just a flash of an image on them. Though Dawn was very impressed by the art work in the city, Ash himself hadn't been interested in it at all. Who cared if a ton of mirrors lined the road in strange shapes? He did now, because there was something very wrong about them.

As he rushed around the corner, Ash came to a sudden stop because he did not expect to see Team Rocket holding Shaymin. Clearly his teenage angst was getting in the way of being able to sense the people who stalked him every day for the past four years.

Ria stopped beside him, looking around with suspicious eyes, while Pikachu jumped up onto his shoulder, cheeks already sparking at the sight of the three stalkers.

Misty almost slammed into him, skidding a bit and nearly toppling over, but managed to straighten herself up while holding onto his backpack. Her brow furrowed as she caught her breath and said, "Team Rocket is the problem?"

He was going to reply with some sarcastically fabulous quip, but whatever he was going to say died on his lips when he saw the reflection on the metal sculptures changing. His stomach dropped and he started running again, Pikachu's tiny claws gripping his vest so that he wouldn't fly off.

"Get away from it!" Ash yelled, but it was too late. There was a sudden whirlwind that started pulling Team Rocket into the sculpture.

Dawn shot forward, trying to wrestle Shaymin out of James' grip. She grunted and tried to pry his fingers from the pokemon, but it wasn't working. Ash watched Leaf form a fist with her hand, slamming it into James' wrist. He yelped, letting go of Shaymin. Dawn caught the pokemon and backed up as Team Rocket was pulled into a rippling hole in the sculpture.

"This is what Shaymin came out of!" Leaf cried out as she held her hat down. Her eyes flickered to Ash as he caught up to them, but if she had something to say, she never got the chance. Dawn and Shaymin were yanked forward, Piplup flipping off her shoulder and landing on the ground. She crashed into Leaf, who tried to keep her steady, but both girls were yanked towards the portal.

Ash, in turn, tried to grab them, to pull them back, because no matter how much he was arguing with Dawn lately, he was not going to let anything happen to her. It didn't matter what he did though, because he was just pulled in along with them.

"Ash!"

He could hear Misty and Brock yelling, but he couldn't see them anymore as he, Leaf, Dawn, Pikachu and Shaymin were yanked into the portal that closed behind them.

...

Misty tried to get there, she tried to help them, but she ended up skidding, slamming and rebounding off the metal surface. She fell to the ground with a painful thud, blinking her eyes a bit as she slowly pushed herself up. The metal was completely solid now, like nothing strange at all had happened.

“Oh Mew,” she whispered, standing up entirely. She was stunned from her collision, and completely dumbfounded by what happened. Ash had been right about meeting Shaymin, and poor Dawn was dragged along with him again.

“How?” Brock muttered, daring to touch the smooth surface. “I don't...” He looked over at her. “Is this why he was acting so weird?”

“No, he didn't know...but he was worried something could happen. You know how legendaries go crazy around him or he finds them just as they go crazy.” Misty shook her head and took a step forward, but her vision doubled as she stumbled a bit. Brock steadied her, his worry obvious. “Light headed from hitting it too hard. I'll be fine.” She straightened up and stared at the metal so fiercely that Brock was sure it would burst into flame or start melting soon. She huffed angrily. “What do we do?”

He slowly shook his head and looked back at the pokemon that remained with them: Piplup and Ria. The water-type ran to the sculpture and banged on it with his tiny, flightless wings, but it didn't do any good. Ria on the other hand sat still, her eyes never once shifting from the metal, an intensity to her that Brock recognized not from her or her trainer, but from the Lucario that came before her.

“We wait.”

...

Desolate black and violent purple clouds surrounded them as Ash, Dawn and Leaf fell through space. He tried to reach out with his aura, but for what purpose, he couldn't say. He wasn't sure if he wanted to figure out where he was or if he wanted to try and stop their falling, but the more they fell the more confused he was. He couldn't describe it if he tried, but everything just felt strange.

He grimaced as they reached the end of the tunnel they were falling through. Over the months, he learned to tune out the constant glow of aura, similar to how a person didn't notice the fact that they could always see their own nose. Tumbling into wherever they were now was a completely different story. Everything was glowing so brightly, and it wasn't just things like people or pokemon or trees. There was a glow to everything in every different direction and it almost instantly gave him a headache.

He didn't even notice the fact that their fall had slowed a lot until his feet softly landed on a small island of stone.

Pikachu's grip on his shoulder loosened a bit as the small pokemon looked around with confusion. He looked at Ash, who had his eyes squeezed shut, and nudged his cheek lightly. “Pikapi?”

“I'm okay.” He slowly opened his eyes bit by bit, even though he couldn't escape the glowing outlines when they were closed. It took him a few moments to get used to the glare of aura, and a few more as he actively tried to ignore it. When he was finally able to look around (everything still had an eerie glow to it, but it was bearable), he couldn't help but stare in awe and confusion. There really didn't seem to be an up or down or anything like that. There were distorted pillars of land and houses that seemed to jut from every direction. Bubbles with images floated by them, and everything in the distance (since there didn't seem to be an up or down or anything like that at all) seemed to ripple like water. What worried him though were the dark, clouds in the distance, but at least they were far away.

Ash shook his head slightly and looked around, “Are you guys okay?”

Dawn was clutching Shaymin close to her chest as her dark blue eyes darted around. Her normally straight, blue hair was a tangled mess from the fall, her hat half off her head, though she didn't seem to notice. Ash was pretty sure she'd be mortified if she saw the condition of her always perfectly cared for hair.

If Leaf had any issues with their soft landing, she didn't show it. Her dusty brown hair that went down to her back now flipped out in all directions even worse than Dawn's, and he almost wanted to laugh except he knew that she could care less. Unlike Dawn, who seemed to be trying to take everything in at once, her narrow eyes slowly scanned the strange world that they were in. She took a single step forward, or at least she tried to, but ended up flinging herself forward with a startled scream.

"Oof!" Ash stumbled back farther than he should have as she slammed into him, both of them falling to the ground and looking at each other with confusion. "What was that?"

She shoved herself up without moving her legs, but then jumped up into the air. Ash blinked with surprise, watching as she ended up soaring about ten feet into the air before slowly coming back down. "Well then," Leaf said as she looked back at him.

"I feel like I don't weigh anything," Dawn mumbled as she stumbled a little bit, clutching onto Shaymin even harder, if that was at all possible.

To test what both the girls were experiencing, Ash jumped up, going over their heads before landing on the ground, Pikachu yelping with surprise as his claws dug into his collar. "Cool."

"I don't like this place," Shaymin spoke up as she started squirming in Dawn's arms. "Get me out of here now!" Though her words were demanding, there was a genuine panic to her voice that stopped Ash from becoming truly annoyed with her again.

He was about to say something else when he felt it. Though he was actively keeping himself from noticing any auras so he wouldn't be overwhelmed, there was no mistaking such a powerful presence. He whipped around just in time to see a massive blur shoot by them. Dawn and Leaf both cried out with surprise and alarm, and all three of them were tossed down onto another platform surrounded by distorted houses.

Though the ground was a familiar cobblestone under their feet, everything just looked and felt too weird with the different gravity and the strange surroundings. Dawn shifted Shaymin in her arms, her voice shaking as she asked, "Was that a p-pokemon?"

"What else could it be?" Leaf replied as it appeared again. It was long and grey with strange wings, golden spikes, and red and black stripes. It circled in the air gracefully, turning around and staring at them with its glowing red eyes. "What is it?"

"It's a legendary," Ash spoke without any sort of hesitation. He tried to think over the stories and myths that they stumbled upon so far, but for the life of him, he couldn't remember hearing about anything quite like this.

"You don't say?" Leaf snapped back at him harshly, taking a step back as the pokemon screeched loudly. It wasn't a roar, but a high-pitch sound that seemed to echo from every direction.

"It's going to eat me!" Shaymin shrieked, shaking in Dawn's arms.

"Pika!" Pikachu cried out, obviously not liking the distress the small pokemon was in. He made to jump forward, no doubt to attack the legendary pokemon, but Ash grabbed him quickly.



"You're strong, but not strong enough to beat that, you'll just make it mad." He held Pikachu to his chest, ignoring the pokemon's annoyed pout. If this pokemon really wanted to eat Shaymin, it probably would have attacked by now. It wasn't like they were a threat to it in any way.

Ash stared at the pokemon, their gazes locking, and he was sure it could see right through him just like Dialga and Palkia probably could. He tilted his head slightly, blinking with surprise when he saw the pokemon do the same. Though Ash didn't want to open himself up to aura in this place, he hesitantly reached out the pokemon, trying to see if he could get a feel for what it wanted, since he was sure it wasn't there to eat Shaymin (who would hardly be a snack for something that big). There was so much anger, frustration and surprisingly, sadness, that it was almost overwhelming. What startled him though was a growing feeling: something warm, something like hope.

"We need to leave now!" Shaymin screamed, breaking him out of his thoughts. The pokemon's voice clearly startled the large one as well, if it's loud screech said anything.

Dawn, glanced at Ash, but he clearly wasn't going to do anything. She huffed angrily before grabbing a pokeball, releasing her Buneary. "Use Ice Beam on it!"

"Wait!" Ash's words were ignored as the pokemon launched its attack and the pokemon vanished.

"Is it gone?" Dawn blinked with surprise, clearly not expecting an easy defeat.

The three humans looked around, and Leaf winced as the pokemon appeared out of nowhere, like it flew through one of the upside down buildings that was there.

"Do it again!" Dawn cried out as the pokemon flew over them, but the ice beam did nothing but leave a very mild ice-burn on its stomach.

"Helpful," Leaf supplied sarcastically, earning a fierce look from the younger girl.

"I don't see you do anything to help!"

"It's not trying to attack us," she spat back. "You attack first and it'll defend itself. All beginners know that you shouldn't pick a fight with a legendary!"

Ash was about to get between the two of them, when a middle-aged man literally leaped out of nowhere. He landed on the ground in front of them, wearing a ragged and torn shirt and shorts, holding his hands out. "Stop it! You can't upset Giratina."

"Giratina?" Ash repeated. He never heard that word before, but somehow it felt right on his lips, like he just knew the name fitted the creature he had never seen before in his life. His eyes turned to the man, wondering where he came from and how he knew that, but the pokemon he had with him, a small Sheldon, blasted the ground with a powerful Hyper Beam attack (or at least, Ash assumed it was Hyper Beam), sending a cloud of dust into the air in the slowest, most awkward explosion Ash had ever seen.

"Hurry!" the man urged them. "This way!" He rushed down an ally, Dawn and Leaf being quick to follow, bounding awkwardly due to the low gravity. Ash looked back in the direction of Giratina, before jumping after the others (because it really wasn't running).

They ran as best as they could down the twisting hall, and Ash was immensely relieved that he was at the back of the group. The wood below their feet broke off in spots, letting a bright green light shine into the hall. Every time he went near one of the spots, it started to glow a little brighter. The last time he saw something like that was at the Tree of Beginning. The aura in this place was ridiculously strong, and it was reacting to him, whether he wanted it to or not.

They reached the end of the hall, and Dawn stumbled towards the edge of the cliff, shrieking with surprise as she clung Shaymin closer. Leaf was closer to her, grabbing her arm before she could fall. "The gravity's normal here!"

It was a good thing that she told him, otherwise he probably would have thrown himself right into the two of them, causing all three of them to pitch over the side and end up who knows where.

"We made it out of the low gravity zone," the man told them as he darted down the stairs. "Follow me!"

"Who is this guy?" Ash asked, casting a glance at Leaf. She shrugged, looking just as perplexed as him.

"Pikapi!"

Ash looked behind him, spotting Giratina circling around not far from them. It didn't make sense how they were so far away from it now, but this whole world was strange. Exchanging looks, it was obvious that none of them had any idea what to do, so they silently agreed to keep following this mystery person.

They were led to what looked like a warped, slanting hotel with simple wooden walls and floors. The man turned to face them, grinning pleasantly as his grey eyes flashed with interest. "Is anybody hurt?"

"Well, I managed not to get eaten," Shaymin spoke up before anyone else could even think of saying something.

Ash crossed his arms in front of him as he stared at Shaymin. "It wasn't going to eat you!"

"It was too!"

"Was not!"

"Are you seriously arguing over this?" Leaf deadpanned, squeezing the bridge of her nose.

Ash looked away from her with a bit of a pout on his face because it was seriously like looking at his mother when she was annoyed. It was entirely possible that Leaf picked up a couple of Delia Ketchum's habits, since she generally did babysit her in the past. His irritation gave out to curiosity as the man pointed at the pokmon and asked, "Are you the Shaymin from before?"

"Who are you?" For once, Ash agreed with the pokemon's words.

"Newton Graceland is the name! I'm in the process of researching the Reverse World!" He put his hands on his hips and smiled proudly.

"The Reverse World?"

Ash looked behind him at Leaf, and Dawn blinked at the girl curiously. "You've heard of it?"

"Well, I heard old stories to scare kids about the monster coming from a shadow world," Leaf admitted, one of her hands fiddling with the edge of her shirt. "Gary and I were talking about the stories not too long ago, and he told me that it was a reference to the Distortion World, or the Reverse World. I thought it was just something from those horrible stories."

Now that she mentioned it, Ash heard those stories when he was younger too. It was one of those

cautionary tales that, in retrospect, he couldn't believe anyone actually told; stories of pokemon that would spirit children away to another world.

“Obviously it's real. You're in it.” He motioned out to the world beyond the distorted patio. “And just so you know, amongst my field, I'm considered a genius!”

Almost identical expressions of disbelief appeared on Ash's and Dawn's faces and Ash mumbled, “Why doesn't he tell us what he really thinks?”

For the first time in a while, Dawn actually smiled at him and giggled. “Such a humble guy, right?”

“What a weirdo,” Shaymin burst out, clearly not catching on to the fact that they were talking very quietly.

Newton was visibly surprised by her words, they could all see as much. He scowled at him, crossing his arms in front of his chest. “That's not a nice thing to say to the person who just saved you.”

Oh, so he was one of those adults. The ones who thought they instantly deserved respect and praise because they happened to be in the right place at the right time. Ash wasn't going to badmouth someone, he wasn't that type of person, but he wasn't just going to comply to every adult that thought they saved him.

“Giratina wasn't going to hurt us,” Ash placed his hands on his hips.

“Pi pika?” Pikachu asked him curiously, and the boy just shook his head.

“You seem sure about that. What's your name?” He didn't look insulted, just curious.

“I'm Ash Ketchum, and this is Pikachu,” he reached back, running his fingers through his pokemon's short fur. For a brief moment, he wondered what Brock, Misty, Ria and Piplup were doing back home and hoped that they were okay. He had to focus on the here and now, if only for his friends.

“I'm Dawn Berlitz, thank you for saving us!” She grinned broadly at him.

“I'm Leaf Green.” She raised an eyebrow at him. “So, what is this place anyway?”

“And what's Giratina, exactly?” Dawn added.

“Those are excellent questions!” Newton waved his hands enthusiastically as he walked out farther so they could see over the balcony easier. He turned around to face them, an excited gleam to his grey eyes. “You see, we're in the middle of another dimension. Which is exactly opposite of the world of reality.”

“The world of reality?” Ash repeated. This place, though incredibly odd, felt real to him.

“Well, remember the gravity? It turns weaker or stronger here, depending on where you happen to be.”

“That's what you're going with?” He waved his arms around dramatically. “How about the strange upside down houses and everything?”

Newton chuckled at Ash and said, “Yes, I suppose there's that too. Your friend was right in saying that this place is like a shadow of our world, or maybe ours is a shadow of this one. They were

made together. Here, everything is distorted, which is where the other name comes from. I suppose it's really the more accurate name of the two.”

He turned away from them, spreading his arms out to the strange world around them. “Even though this world and ours exist side by side, they do not intersect at all, like a separate shadow of our own world. Or maybe ours is the shadow, who knows? Only Giratina has the power to travel between these worlds. Moreover, it's the only pokemon that exists here, making it the master of the Reverse World!” He lowered his arms and nodded. “I've studied this world for years, and every day, I find something new about it.”

“That can't be true,” Leaf spoke up, her brow furrowing with obvious confusion

“What? Of course it is. I am the expert on this world.” He honestly sounded insulted, and it took her a moment to realize why.

“Oh, I didn't mean about you discovering new things, that, I believe,” she waved her hand at him almost dismissively and Ash almost laughed. “It's just...I saw...Dialga?” She looked at Ash for confirmation, and he nodded his head. “Right, I saw Dialga come from here. Shaymin too.”

Newton was silent for a moment, and they could almost see him piecing together his thoughts. He didn't get the chance to answer Leaf though. As he opened his mouth to speak, Shaymin interrupted. “Well I don't like Giratina.” She held her nose in the air. “That monster tried to eat me.”

“Huh?” Newton honestly looked surprised. “Why would that be.”

Ash sighed and shook his head. “She's crazy. It wasn't trying to eat her.” Pikachu mirrored his actions, because though the pokemon couldn't sense what Ash could, he had enough faith in his trainer to believe him.

“Ash,” Dawn hissed at him. He glared back at him, though he didn't say anything.

The tension must have been obvious, making Newton shift uncomfortably. It was just as obvious that he wasn't used to interacting with other people anymore. He suddenly perked up and asked, “Would you, perhaps, like to go back to the real world?”

“I thought you said that only Giratina could move between worlds?” Leaf put her hands on her hips and stared at him with a raised eyebrow.

Ash snickered a bit, but said, “If you know a way back, that'd be great.” This place was really throwing him off, and he didn't like that one bit. Combined with both the attitudes of Shaymin and Dawn, he was ready to just go back and lay in bed all day. Or eat. Maybe both.

“Pika!” Pikachu agreed with a nod.

“Yes! I have to get to the flower garden right away!”

“How about we let Giratina take you there?” Ash suggested. Leaf snickered beside him while Dawn looked scandalized.

“There is a way.” For not interacting with people in a while, Newton could certainly pick the right time to stop a potential argument. He pressed a button on his backpack and a strange device came out of it. It moved in front of him, and he stared at whatever was on the tiny screen. “Good, we still have time.” He pressed the button again and it retracted into his pack again. “Come on, this way.”

Ash and Leaf exchanged wary looks, and Dawn looked from one to the other, until Ash sighed and lead the way, hurrying after Newton. From the sounds, it was clear that Dawn and Leaf were both following him closely. None of them actually knew this man, and it was one thing talking to him, but another following him to who knows where. Still, they didn't really have a choice.

They walked a brisk pace along arching, stone paths with sheer, bottomless drops on either side of them. Newton's expertise and excitement over the Reverse World became more and more obvious as they walked. He rambled on about almost everything that they came across.

"I became obsessed with the Reverse World, and I began researching exhaustively. The next thing I knew, five years had gone by," he explained happily.

"Five years?" Ash repeated. Not even Professor Oak got that caught up in his work, and that was saying something.

"You know, I think I've heard of him," Leaf muttered quietly, and Ash looked at her over his shoulder. "We always hung around Professor Oak's lab a lot, right? Well I think I remember him saying something about a colleague that vanished chasing after impossible legends, or something like that."

"He was right though," Dawn mentioned to the world around them. "We're here too, right? Pretty impressive if no one else believed him."

"He's just a werido," Shaymin inputted helpfully.

Newton stumbled, and at first, Ash thought that it was because of Shaymin's words, but then he saw it: a massive, black and cloud hovering in front of them. The hair on his arms stood on end, and Pikachu let out an unhappy whimper from his shoulder. He shifted slightly, moving in front of Dawn as he asked, "What is that?" They were the clouds that he saw in the distance when he first got there, though they had been too far and too overwhelmed by light for him to really feel how wrong they were.

"When there are imbalances in our world, this world then corrects them to maintain the balance between time and space. Whenever this occurs, a black cloud appears." Newton looked over his shoulder at them with a frown. "This has been happening more and more often lately, and the clouds are getting even bigger. Giratina's been much more on edge, though I don't know why."

"The balance between time and space?" Ash repeated, whispers more to himself than anything else. Dawn shifted behind him uncomfortably.

"That's amazing," Leaf stared at the cloud with interest, even as Newton walked around it. She reached her hand out, but jerked it back when he yelled at her.

"Be careful! Don't breath it in and try not to touch it!" She looked around at him with wide eyes. "It's poisonous. One quick breath in, and you'll get sick. Too much and...well you know what happens with poison. There may be a cure in the world of reality, but I'm not sure."

Leaf took a few steps back, but Ash knew the look on her face when her eyes narrowed and she started pouting. She was even more curious. "Gracidea root might."

"Gracidea root?" Dawn repeated.

"Yeah." She looked over her shoulder and nodded her head in confirmation. Reaching into her backpack, she pulled out her tablet (that still worked, surprisingly), flipping through the notes that

she had until she found a rather plain-looking root. "That's what I was looking for. It's kind of a cure-all for poisons that are created by pokemon, but it's incredibly rare and has been seen less and less for absolutely no reason."

"A lot has been changing lately," Newton agreed with her. That amused Ash more than it should have, since she was constantly contradicting or questioning the older man. "It's so strange. I haven't been back home to know what's going on."

"Time and space," Ash spoke up slowly, "they were never supposed to meet."

"That's right. You've heard the stories too." He seemed positively thrilled about that.

Ash looked down at the cracked ground beneath his feet as they walked, fiddling with the beak of his cap. He bit his lip, glancing over at Pikachu as he nuzzled his cheek and smiled encouragingly. His bright brown eyes looked towards Newton and he said, "They did meet though."

"What?" The man actually stumbled over his own Sheldon, though he caught his balance before he fell over. He stopped walking and stared at Ash with wide eyes. "Are you sure?"

"Positive. We were there when it happened." He motioned towards himself and Dawn. "Something happened to force Dialga and Palkia together, and they fought. They ended up here and almost completely destroyed Alamos Town. Though they were stopped."

"That actually explains a lot!" Newton suddenly sounded excited, but that quickly changed to a dark grimace as he kept walking. "If they did collide, both time and space would have been distorted. It would explain all of the toxicity that's been appearing here, and Giratina's attitude, and what it did to Dialga."

"Well, I'd be pretty mad if someone filled my home with poison too." Leaf pointed out, scowling fiercely.

"Giratina made its way to the real world and proceeded to capture Dialga, and Dialga was trapped here, unable to leave." He nodded at Leaf. "However..." His eyes turned to Shaymin. "Your Seed Flare was so powerful that it actually managed to rip a hole to the real world. That was how Dialga escaped." He shook his head. "It wouldn't normally be able to happen, but the barriers between all dimensions are thinning, and that's very dangerous."

"That's why Giratina's angry with Shaymin," Dawn looked down at the pokemon that she was cradling.

"Really, really angry," the pokemon agreed. "He just needs anger management. He can go with the Chosen One."

"Chosen One?" Dawn repeated, her eyebrows raising along with her voice.

Ash's shoulders tensed and Pikachu's ears twitched. Leaf's dusty eyes snapped towards him, narrowing slightly as he tried to avoid her gaze. Ash shifted a bit and tried to smile at her, but it came out as more of a grimace that only got worse as she pursed her lips.

"That's not all!" Newton interrupted any questions or anything else Shaymin could blurt out. Ash silently thanked the old man. "Giratina can no longer leave the Reverse World!"

"What? Why?" Dawn asked, sounding horrified by the thought.

“Because of Dialga.” Well, that answer should have been obvious, now shouldn't it? It was too bad the man didn't go into details, but maybe that was just Ash's sarcastic opinion.

“Serves Giratina right.” That made Ash's head snap around, and he glared fiercely at the little pokemon. Shaymin kept wanting their help, for them to take her to the stupid flower garden that she could get to just fine on her own, but then said that another legendary pokemon deserved to be trapped in another world alone? That didn't sit well with him.

“He wasn't trying to eat you!” Ash spat at her, positively seething.

“What do you know?” She shot back.

“That you're not even a nugget to him so why would he care? That he...” he trailed off as a bubble floated by them, completely distracting him and replacing most of his anger with confusion. He blinked once, then twice, as he stared at the distorted image on it. “Misty? Brock? Ria and Piplup too!”

“Huh?” Dawn leaned closer, her face twisting into one of shock when she recognized their other friends. “What the?” She reached out to it.

“Don't touch it!” It was too late, Dawn's finger already came into contact with the bubble, and she winced when it popped.

“Careful! If something gets destroyed here, it has a big influence on the real world!” Newton scolded them.

“Are they okay?” Ash asked, a bit of alarm to his voice. If something happened to Misty or Brock just because they popped a stupid bubble, he'd never forgive himself.

“Pika cha pika?” Pikachu muttered, his ears dropping from where he sat on Ash's shoulder.

“I can't see a small bubble causing anything major.” Newton waved them off. “Just don't touch anything else.”

Ash blinked because Newton was suddenly walking on the wall like it was no big deal. He looked down as he walked, but the cracked, paved ground didn't seem any different to him. When he looked up though, he was completely sideways.

Ash really didn't like this world. It was messing with his brain.

“This is where things get strange again.” Newton jumped across a break in the road that led to a steep drop, his Sheldon following him closely. “Our destination's straight ahead!”

Ash was about to take a step forward when a massive shape flew under them. He twisted around with alarm, watching as Giratina circled around. It was chirping at them – making high, but loud noises that didn't seem all that angry to him. He wanted to stop, to try and reach out to understand exactly what was going on, but Shaymin had other plans.

“Let's go!” she jumped onto Ash's head, knocking Pikachu off to the ground, twisting his neck more than the first time she did it. Pain shot up his muscles, making his shoulder tingle in protest. He yelped and stumbled forward, eyes watering as he lost focus and the brilliant auras around him started shining too brightly again. His fall might have been light, but it still stung when he hit the ground, his sore neck screaming in protest.

Ash groaned and pushed himself up, glancing at his discarded hat, but there was no little pokemon

anywhere on it or the small island he landed on. Not that he could really see, everything was blurring together in his vision like a living wall of light.

He didn't know when he closed his eyes again (not that it helped), but he heard someone call his hand and put a hand on his shoulder. Slowly, he blinked open his eyes, focusing a little more so he could actually see semi-properly. The first thing he saw were Dawn's pale pink boots as she stood in front of them, staring up at Giratina as it flew away.

"It has Shaymin!" she cried out in alarm. "What do we do?"

"Calm down!" Leaf snapped from where she was kneeling beside him. "We'll think of something but you have to stop panicking!"

"What are you guys talking about?" Ash asked, feeling rather lightheaded. He pointed at his hat. "She's right there."

"Ashy-boy, that's your hat," Leaf patted his shoulder. "Great, we broke you."

"Under it, smartass." She made a face back at him, but turned her attention to the cap anyway.

Sure enough, his hat jerked as Shaymin shrugged it off, fluffing out her grass-like fur. "You guys need to get with the program."

"Substitute," Newton said as he jumped down to their level. "I have to say, I'm very impressed."

Dawn picked Shaymin up, and Leaf helped Ash to his feet. He looked towards the sky, well, he looked upwards even though there clearly wasn't a sky up there, watching Giratina fly around, chirping in despair.

"Leave," Ash muttered under his breath, his eyes locked onto the massive pokemon.

"Yeah, that's what we're doing, you okay?" Leaf asked him as she tugged on his arm to get him to run.

Pikachu picked up his hat and jumped onto Ash's shoulder. He shook his head slightly to clear it, but just ended up hurting himself more. "As good as I can be." He followed her and Dawn as they ran after Newton, away from Giratina. He stopped in front of a strange hole that felt almost empty compared to everything else there, a void amidst a world of life.

"You can't come through that, but you should be able to leave. Giratina made it but can't go through it. Hurry, before it closes!"

Ash looked behind him at Giratina, feeling the urge to stay to help that pokemon even though he was so resistant to helping Shaymin, but he caught sight of the fear in Dawn's eyes. She didn't want to be there, and though they argued more lately, he knew it wouldn't sit well with her if he tried to stay. Glancing at Leaf, he realized that she was giving him that familiar, stern, warning stare that she always used to give him when she knew he was plotting something stupid as kids. Knowing her, she'd probably throw him through the portal if he tried to stay.

Ash sighed and then looked back to Dawn. "Go first with Shaymin."

She nodded and jumped, instantly vanishing on their end. He exchanged a look with Leaf, who seemed ready to argue with him about who should go first, but he must have been using his rare death glare, because she sighed like he had before. "Come right after me. Don't do anything Ashy-like." She jumped and vanished.



Ash breathed out and helped Pikachu jump into the portal before looking at Newton. “Are you coming?”

“No, I have more work here to do. You better hurry though, or you'll be trapped.” He looked towards Giratina. “I'll be fine here. We have an understanding.”

Ash nodded but hesitated for just a moment. “You were right. It's trapped, and it doesn't want to be.”

Newton slowly nodded his head, realizing that he was speaking of the legendary pokemon. “It might come for Shaymin again. Giratina can still see into the real world, so be careful, and try to avoid mirrors or any reflective surfaces. Just because it can't escape doesn't mean it can't pull you back.” He pushed Ash, who yelped with surprise, not expecting the motion.

Everything was black and purple again, the strange twist of clouds, and the aura that burned into his eyes started to fade. Ash couldn't focus on that though. All he could hear was Giratina's desperate cries that followed him.

*Sky*

## Desperate Actions

Bright red eyes stared at the sleek, shiny surface, torn between curiosity and frustration. Tapping it with her paw, Ria growled at the sculpture. Most people would probably coo at the smaller than average Riolu, assuming that she was growling at her reflection, but most people also didn't see her trainer get pulled inside the piece of metal.

"It'll be okay Ria," Misty spoke up, sitting down beside her. She reached out, brushing her finger's through the pokemon's soft fur. "Ash always gets into trouble, but somehow he always ends up fine."

"Pip piplup?" Piplup came over to them, climbing up onto Misty's lap and staring at his reflection curiously.

Though Misty had no idea what the water pokemon was saying, she still made a guess. "I'm sure Dawn will be fight. She's a scrappy little thing." Piplup snickered.

"That depends on how you view scrappy," Brock chuckled. "There's Dawn's version, and then there's yours."

"Shut up." She pouted at him, not truly angry. "I'm not like that anymore." She reached for her backpack, digging through the things that she had inside until she found her little tube of balm to use on her dry lips.

"Scrappy? Nah, I wouldn't use that to describe you. Not anymore. I fear for my ear too much." He shook his head, his smile fading as he looked up towards the sky. "I brought it up before but...look you don't have to tell me if I'm right or wrong, but I just wanna get this out there. Sort out my own thoughts. Just let me talk for a minute, okay?"

"Sure?" Misty tossed the lip balm back into her bag and turned her attention away from the, staring up at him curiously as she absent-mindedly ran her fingers through Piplup's feathers and Ria's fur.

"Ever since Alamos Town, Ash has been acting...stranger than normal. Like, he keeps looking over his shoulder, and he's wary and cynical about some things. It just not him. I asked this before, but this is why, isn't it?" Brock motioned to the sculptures. "The second he realized what Shaymin was, he didn't want anything to do with her, even though I know a part of him wants to help, whether or not he denies it." Brock walked up to the sculpture and placed his hand on the cold metal. "It's just who he is. I just...I worry about him. You know? Crazy stuff happens all the time, and he just rolls with it. I try but I never get quite as involved. We can't change what happened, but we can help him sort through it all. I guess that's all I want to know, if he's told you anything, or if he's keeping it all to himself."

"Spoken like an older brother through and through." Misty's smile faded some. "He does. He talks to me about all kinds of things that I guess he usually keeps to himself. You can't be surprised though. We did that since we were young, ranting and arguing at first, and then just spilling everything when we were older. Don't give me that look, I know we still argued." She glared back and him and he shook his head, clearly amused. "You know, I think most of this...moodiness comes from not knowing what he's supposed to do, or who he is. You know?"

Brock thought about that and slowly nodded his head. "That makes sense. I'd question what I'm supposed to be doing or who I am if all this crazy stuff happened directly around me. I mean, I'm there for a lot of it, but Ash really gets involved. But he's 14 and he doesn't have to know what he

wants. Neither do you. Hell, sometimes I don't even know what I'm doing and I'm five years older than you guys.” He frowned a bit. “He'll figure it out eventually and we'll help him if he needs it. I'm just glad he tells someone what's going on in his head. It doesn't matter if it stays between you two, unless it's a life or death situation. Then, I need to know.” He put his hands on his hips and stared at her sternly. “Understand?”

“As far as I know, it's not.” She scowled at the thought. Though Brock was talking about a hypothetical situation, they both knew just how dangerous the world could be. Just because they were young, didn't mean they would be spared. She looked up at him to say something else, but the sun reflecting off of the sculpture into her eyes made Misty wince. The light danced off the surface, and she gasped when she realized it wasn't the reflection moving, it was the metal itself. “Get away from it!”

Brock jerked back, twisting around to stare at where his hand was seconds ago. He gaped and took a hesitant step back as he watched the metal ripple like water. Carefully, he reached a finger out to touch it, ignoring Misty's angry hissing to stop. She was holding Piplup and Ria back, so it wasn't like she could stop him without dropping one of them.

Exactly like water, the metal rippled from where he touched it, but nothing else happened. He continued to stare, wondering if he could try to shove his hand in to see if he could get to where their friends were, but yelped as he was tugged backwards. Looking behind him, Brock saw that Ria was balancing on Misty's shoulder with ease, leaving the redhead with a free hand to pull him around with. Apparently she could stop him without dropping one of them.

“Mew help me, I thought Ash was dense,” she breathed out heavily and glared at him. “We don't know if that would take us to the others if it opened up again.”

“What else would it do?”

“I don't know! That's the point! Come on Brock, work with me here!” They stared at the metal as it settled and became solid again, waiting for something to happen, though it never did.

Misty sighed and flopped back onto the ground, laying with her back against the cool grass. She put her hand over her eyes to block the sunlight and said, “This is giving me a headache. Well a worse one.”

“Maybe you shouldn't lay in the sun then,” he suggested as he followed her lead, sitting on the ground and stretching out his legs. “We both know you burn a lot.” It was true. Where Brock was always dark and Ash just tanned no matter what, all of the girls that they travelled with tended to burn, and Misty was a special case at that to the point where Ash claimed that her burns could burn.

Normally, silence between the two of them was fairly content, where they could be around each other but not have to constantly talk to interact, but Brock found himself becoming more and more restless as the seconds ticked by. Their friends were potentially in danger and they were just sitting there enjoying the sun like it was an average day. It just didn't feel right and the silence only made that more and more obvious to the young man.

They were both waiting for something to happen, though neither was quite sure what they were waiting for exactly. Maybe the sky would turn dark and the world would vanish, or maybe a freak storm would hit. The sky didn't get dark though. The sun was bright and cheerful, and the rest of the world moved on without any hint that something strange was going on and it was wrong.

The first thing he tried to do was read, pulling out a book from his bag and trying to focus, but

Brock found himself checking the time every couple minutes, making it feel like time was trickling by.

Finally, he cleared his throat to catch her attention. “When did your headache start?” Brock mentally slapped himself, because that was clearly a good topic to latch onto.

Luckily, Misty seemed willing to have any conversation just to break the silence. “It started earlier at the Pokemon Center. Probably just stress about this whole thing.”

“Probably,” he agreed. “People shouldn't have to deal with stress and headaches when they're on vacation, especially not a Gym Leader. There's enough of that to deal with at home.”

“You're not kidding,” Misty groaned out, shifting a little bit so that she could actually see him. “You know what it's like to run a gym but imagine a massive pool and an aquarium on top of that? There are so many repairs, renovations, and the bills that go with them! Not to mention, you know how the system works, how gyms are specified certain 'levels' pokemon can be.” She made air quotations at the word 'level' since while they were general outlines for how each pokemon breed should develop (most of it labelled at different levels just for convenience), there were always far too many exceptions to that idea to really take it into stock. Still, Brock knew what she meant. At Pewter City, he (and now his brother) was expected to have pokemon that beginner trainers could potentially overcome, even though most Gym Leaders had stronger ones.

Brock could understand why Misty sounded annoyed with that. For someone who wanted to become a Master, it could be very limiting for their training. It was never something that bothered him, but he could still empathize with her.

“You know, Daisy's been battling a lot lately,” Misty said, smiling a little bit. “She's been doing really well. The contests have been going really well too. May won the very first one we held.” The pride in her voice was so terribly obvious, that it made Brock laugh. She was clearly both proud of May and of the fact that she was the one who finally whipped her oldest sister into shape. “Oh! The water shows aren't just the three of them anymore either. They started taking in actors and actresses on a volunteer basis. People to work lighting and things like that too. You know, to get the community more involved. That was my idea.”

“That's awesome, but soon you're going to have your sisters taking over everything and actually being good at it.” Daisy, Lily and Violet were at the top of his 'hotness' list, but even he (from a distance where he couldn't see their goddess-like figures) could admit that they were pretty bad Gym Leaders before.

“That's the point.” Misty put her hand over her eyes to block out the sun. “I love the gym, and I don't want it to get ruined again. I love being the Gym Leader, helping trainers and so much more, I don't regret going back, but it's not what I want to do forever, you know? I want to explore and see the world. I want to be the best Water Pokemon Master. If you ever tell Ash I stole that from him, I will knock out your teeth.”

Brock laughed loudly and shook his head. He reached into his bag, pulling out a bottle of water and tossing it to her. “You look like you could use it, you're already burning up. And that's great that you know what you want Misty. I won't say a word to Ash. He knows what you want to do though, right?”

“Yup!” She guzzled the water greedily. “I even said that maybe I could join up with your guys after that and you wanna know what he did? He got mad at me. Told me to go wherever I needed to go and do what I needed to do to get what I wanted.” Misty beamed at him. “Not many people would say something like that.”

“No, they wouldn't.” Brock knew that Ash missed Misty when she wasn't around (not to say that he was always depressed or she was always on his mind, he did have a life beyond her too), though it became a little more obvious from time to time after they started dating. The fact that Ash pushed so hard for his friends to reach their dreams, even if it didn't go with what he wanted, made Brock swell with pride. He wouldn't have done that when he was ten.

Some time passed with absolutely nothing happening. Ria took to drawing little pictures in the dirt with a stick, while Piplup pointed at them and talked enthusiastically, apparently guessing what it was. The game went on for a while when Ria suddenly tensed, her eyes narrowing as she looked up at Misty and then jumped at her.

Misty yelped as she crashed into the ground. Ria was only a tiny thing, but Misty wasn't expecting the tackle at all so she couldn't prepare for it. A split second later, a small explosion threw Brock to the ground with a painful thud. He looked at her and she looked at him before they both got up. Misty stumbled, but Brock grabbed her arm to stop her from falling over.

“You okay?”

“Yeah. Just a little lightheaded.” She pressed her hand to her head and looked down at Ria.

“Thanks. I was standing right where...whatever that was went off.”

“Ri rio riolu,” she sighed in reply.

“Pip piplup.”

“Riolu rio.”

Misty and Brock waited for something else to happen, but nothing did.

The minutes ticked by in stillness and silence until Ria perked up again, jumped over to the sculpture and pacing in front of it eagerly. She glanced back at the two trainers, tilting her head as she regarded Brock silently. Making a decision, she turned to the sculpture and said, “They're coming back.”

“Are they?” Misty asked, not bothering to try and mask her enthusiasm.

“Yeah. It might be a few minutes but they'll be here.” She sounded so sure that Misty just nodded her head.

“Ria can talk?” Brock asked, his mouth hanging open. “Since when can she use telepathy?”

“Well, before I visited at Alamos Town.” Misty shrugged, though she was barely paying attention to him. “Ash doesn't want people to know about the whole aura thing, so they keep quiet. Talk with their minds instead.”

“That...explains a lot, actually.” True to form, he accepted it and moved on because they really met way too many pokemon that could use telepathy to be truly surprised over it anymore (and that wasn't even including the talking Meowth that always followed them around). Plus Ria could use aura, so it shouldn't have shocked him at all.

Instead, Brock saved all his shock for when the metal started to ripple like water again. A moment later, Dawn slowly appeared, as if she was being squeezed out of a small tube. He rushed forward, grabbing onto her shoulders and yanking her out of the sculpture, holding onto her shoulders so that she wouldn't hit the ground.

"Are you okay?" he asked her worriedly.

"Of course I am," Shaymin answered before the girl could say anything, scratching her fur and looking around with disinterest until her eyes landed on Misty and she just stared.

"What?" the teenager asked, narrowing her eyes in return. Surprisingly enough, Shaymin didn't say anything. She just blinked innocently. Misty just huffed with annoyance and moved to Dawn's side. "How about you?"

"I'm fine," Dawn assured her, smiling brightly when she saw Piplup. Though she really didn't want to, Misty still took Shaymin into her arms so that the blue-haired girl could scoop up her pokemon, hugging him and laughing.

Shaymin moved in her arms, and said, "You're holding me too tight."

"Live with it," Misty chirped happily and looked towards the metal as it started to ripple again. This time, Leaf slowly appeared head first. Like with Dawn, Brock reached out to grab her shoulders to help her out. She smoothed out her skirt when she landed, looking around to take in her surroundings. She turned around to face the sculpture just in time to catch Pikachu.

"Well hello there," she said with a small smile that faded as quickly as it appeared. "He better not have tried to stay there."

"What now?" Misty asked, her expression twisting to one of annoyance.

Leaf opened her mouth to answer but Ria perked up, hopping towards the sculpture and eagerly shifted back and fourth. A moment later the rippling started again, and Ash slowly came out just like the others. Brock helped him to his feet, and he rolled his shoulders a bit. "Man that was weird."

"Riori!" Ria hopped up onto his arms, startling him at first, but then Ash laughed as he hugged his youngest pokemon. "Misty and Brock take good care of you?"

"Ri!"

"What happened?" Brock interjected before anyone could get sidetracked.

"You'll never believe it!" Dawn cried out as she snuggled Piplup closer. "We went to a whole other world!"

"Another world?"

A high-pitched cry echoed from all around them, stopping any conversation and making them all tense up. Misty and Brock looked around with confusion, but the other three knew exactly what this was.

"We need to go," Ash said urgently. "Right now."

"Why, what's..." Misty trailed off when she saw the reflections around them start to warp and change. "What's going on?"

"It's Giratina!" Shaymin screamed, jumping from Misty's arms up onto Ash's hat and jerking him roughly. "It's going to eat me and we need to run!"

"It's not going to eat you!" Ash snapped irritably. He pulled her off of his hat, handing her back to

Dawn. "But we need to go now unless we want it dragging us back there. Somewhere without metal or mirrors or reflective things. That's what Newton said."

"Where though? Back to the Pokemon Center so you guys can explain what's going on?" Brock exclaimed, hauling on his pack.

"Too many reflective surfaces," Leaf pointed out, her eyes never leaving the shifting reflections. "I think I might know a place."

"Lead the way." The air started to move around them, pushing towards the reflective surface. Another piercing cry echoed around them. "Now!"

Leaf motioned for them to follow her, and then she started to run. Dawn clutched Piplup and Shaymin tightly, and Ash made sure that Pikachu and Ria were back on his shoulders and ready to hold on before they, as well as Misty and Brock, started to follow her.

One step after another, they rushed around the twisted, narrow back alleys reflections shining and shifting behind them. Brock and Misty didn't even know what they were running from yet (What was a Giratina?), but they knew that if it had Ash running, they should probably keep up with him.

Finally, after running down a set of stairs, Leaf came to a stop. They were in a small corner surrounded by stone walls and vegetation, wooden benches strewn every few meters.

"This works," Dawn said, twisting around as she studied the place. "How did you know this was here?"

"I stopped here to feed my pokemon yesterday," Leaf explained with a small shrug.

"Will someone tell us what's going on?" Brock asked, motioning to himself and Misty. The redhead nodded as she made her way to the bench and flopped down onto the wooden surface, her hands crossing over her stomach.

"We went to this place, called the Reverse World," Ash explained as he sat down beside his girlfriend.

"Or the Distortion World," Leaf piped up.

Ash shrugged but nodded his head. "Anyway, it's really weird because everything goes in every direction, there's no up or down or anything like that and gravity is messed up all over the place in different ways. We met this guy there who studies the place and he explained it to us. The pokemon that brought us there was Giratina, the master of that world. It's like..." He looked over at Leaf.

She stared at him, as if trying to figure out what he wanted her to say. She didn't understand, but she started talking anyway. "That place is almost like a shadow world, a balancing one for ours. Giratina is the only pokemon there and it's strong. A legendary pokemon. Normally it can travel between that world and this one, but it was trapped there by Dialga, and that's when I saw it leave yesterday. Shaymin's Seed Flare though, if it's strong enough, can apparently blast a hole through and Giratina could get out."

"That's why Giratina wants Shaymin," Ash gave the pokemon a deadpanned expression. "Not to eat her."

"It still wants to eat me!"

Brock was already flipping through a book that he had. He frowned a bit before saying, "There's not much known about Giratina, even in legends. Like, Dialga and Palkia all have different legends and stories behind them, but it's like no one cares to write anything down about it."

"Good riddance!" Shaymin scowled. "He's creepy and doesn't deserve fun stories!" She shifted a bit. "Now, let's start talking about the real problem!"

"The real problem?" Dawn asked her curiously, tilting her head slightly as she looked down at the pokemon. Sitting on her shoulder, Piplup mimicked the action with curious eyes.

"Yes! Getting me to the Flower Garden!"

"Not that again!" Ash groaned. "Just go yourself. Avoid reflections...which isn't that hard in the woods. You're good."

"No!" She hopped out of Dawn's arms, landing on the ground where she stomped her foot angrily. "You're going to take me there! You have to!"

"We don't have to do anything!"

"You do." Ash didn't like that smug expression on her face at all. "I made sure of it."

"What did you do?" He couldn't shake the dread that was filling him. He didn't like the certainty he could feel rolling off the small pokemon, and the tiny, barely visible fragment of guilt didn't put him at ease either.

A groan answered him, and he looked over just in time as Misty slumped over onto him, her eyes squeezed shut as she shook slightly, her hands still wrapped tightly around her own waist. "Mist?" He reached out to push her hair out of her face but jerked his hand back with surprise. "She feels like she's on fire!"

"Pikachu!" Pikachu jumped up and sniffed her face, his ears drooping. Ria tilted her head and stared at Misty with confusion, not quite understanding what was going on.

Brock was in front of them almost instantly, pressing his hand against her forehead. "She is. I thought the red on her face was from a sunburn." Her arms and legs were completely devoid of any red skin though, so that threw the sunburn theory out the window. When Misty burned, she burned everywhere.

Misty opened her eyes, glancing up at her two best friends and said, "I think I'm going to throw up."

"When did this start? Right now?" the eldest of the group asked, keeping his voice calm and assertive.

"No. Earlier I felt a little nauseated but it didn't seem like a big deal. I felt really lightheaded while running here." She closed her eyes again, still resting against Ash. The teenager fidgeted because he didn't know what to do. He tried to keep himself as still as he possibly could so that he wouldn't jerk her off too much.

"What did you eat?"

"Same things you did."

"Did you drink or touch anything else?"



Ash listened to them both, trying to remember earlier that day. There was something at the edge of his mind that was sending off warning bells, but he couldn't quite figure out exactly what it was.

“Could it have to do with the Reverse World?” Dawn asked worriedly. “Maybe we brought something back by accident?”

Ash looked down at Shaymin, who looked directly back at him. Suddenly, the memory clicked and he stiffened. “You made sure of it.” His eyes narrowed at the pokemon. “What did you do?!”

“Ash?” Dawn took a step back from him, and everyone else stopped talking.

“The spores this morning!” Ash seethed at the pokemon. He probably would have jumped at her if he wasn't supported the now quiet Misty, who was keenly listening to what he was saying. “When Misty picked you up this morning!”

“Spores...oh! Oh...” At first Leaf sounded excited but then she let the syllable hang on her lips as her hand went up to cover her mouth in shock. She looked at Shaymin with unreadable eyes. “You poisoned her.”

Brock's face twisted into one of horror, while Misty's went blank.

“What?” Dawn burst out. “That's crazy, Leaf! Why would a pokemon—.”

“I did,” Shaymin interrupted her, sounding quite proud of herself. “But don't worry, gracidea root will help her. So you have to take me to the Flower Garden. It's the only place where the flower blooms right now.” She ignored how Pikachu, Ria and Piplup all glared and growled at her in their own way.

“You...you...” Ash spluttered, unable to say anything else, his arms shaking in rage. His shaking, his inability to say anything, spurred Misty out of her stunned silence.

“You stupid little—!” She shot up, her face red with anger and twisted into an absolutely ferocious expression that would make her Gyarados run and hide. She actually managed to snatch Shaymin out of Dawn's arms before the girl could protest, and shook her roughly.

The pokemon cheered her on.

“Are you telling me that you used poison spores just so we'd have to take you to stop stupid garden?” She shook her again. “Are you kidding me?! I'm not some stupid pawn you can just use! Ash! Do you have a fire pokemon? I wanna set her on fire!” She swung around to try and face him, stumbling a little bit. Leaf grabbed her and kept her steady, and Dawn pried Shaymin away from her.

Misty was going to continue raging, but her eyes went wide and her face went pale. She pushed away from Leaf, spinning around and leaning over, throwing up on the ground.

Ash grimaced with disgust, but it wasn't the first time he saw her sick like this so he shrugged it off, putting a hand on her shoulder and rubbing it, while Brock came up to her other side to make sure she wouldn't fall over.

“Look,” Leaf said as she put her hands on her hips. “This is...dispicable,” She spat out the word while staring at the pokemon. “But unfortunately, Shaymin's right. It could take us forever to try and figure out exactly what type of poison it was, and I get the feeling flower face there isn't going to help.” Shaymin turned up her nose at that. “Gracidea root is almost like a cure-all of things. I'm positive it'll help her and I know how to make antidotes from it.” Finishing Professor Oak's

research on natural poison cures turned her into a bit of an expert on the subject.

“So we need to get Shaymin to the Flower Garden,” Dawn spoke up, her voice small and timid.

“We need to make sure Giratina doesn't pull her away so yeah, we do.” Leaf's expression softened. “Misty? It's probably going to get a lot worse before it gets better. So don't do things like what you just did. Take it easy. We don't know exactly what we're dealing with.”

Misty just groaned but nodded her head.

Ash wanted to argue with Leaf about helping. He was outraged that a pokemon would actually hurt any friend of his, but the fact that it was Misty honestly made it worse. It was a strange feeling that confused him, but now wasn't really the time to focus on that. He knew that Leaf was right, but he didn't like the situation at all.

They had to go to the Flower Garden now. There was no choice in the matter.

“Fine,” he spat out, eyes locked onto Shaymin. “Fine. We'll take you to your stupid garden. To help Misty.” He looked around to gauge the reactions of everyone else. Misty was still silently fuming as she leaned on him. Brock's face was twisted up in an unimpressed scowl. Dawn's eyes were watering a bit as she loosely held Shaymin. Leaf was doing the same as him, looking around from one person to the next. Pikachu was entirely too affronted, and from the looks of it, Ria and Piplup were both trying to mimic his heated glare, though they couldn't get the sparking cheeks down right.

Surprisingly, Shaymin kept herself quiet, though she seemed immensely please with herself and Ash fought the urge to kick her. He had to actively remind himself that she was a legendary pokemon and could easily make his life a lot worse.

Ash seriously didn't know how that day could have gotten any worse, but the silent question was answered almost immediately. A horde of Magnemite surrounded them, chanting and floating in circles, with a couple Magnetron floating farther away.

He just had to ask, didn't he?

*Sky*

## Pursuit Of The Magnemite

The Magnemite and Magnetron circled around them, leaving no room for escape. Dawn clutched Piplup and Shaymin tightly as Brock kept Misty upright, Ash and Leaf moving in front of everyone else protectively.

“What's going on?” Dawn asked, her voice shaky as she looked at the metallic pokemon.

“Magnezone.”

They all looked up and saw a much larger, metal pokemon hovering over them. Ash's hand twitched towards his pocket, where he kept his pokedex, because he had never actually met this particular creature before, though he knew that it was obvious an evolved form of Magnetron (someone really needed to keep better track of who evolved, because they kept 'discovering' new forms of them), and any third stages were something to be wary of.

“I'll take that Shaymin off your hands.”

Ash's attention was pulled from the pokemon to a man hovering on what he had to describe as a metal, hover-segway. He had white hair that flipped out, pasty skin and a ridiculous yellow jumpsuit with gold, black and decorating it, a large black zero in the middle.

His aura was something else. It was dark and malicious, and no matter how utterly furious he was with Shaymin, he wouldn't hand his worst enemy over to someone like that. Just his presence almost left a bitter taste in Ash's mouth, causing his shoulders to tense as he took a step back.

“Who are you?” he demanded angrily, but the man didn't answer him, he just stared with his Magnemite and their evolutions floating around him.

“Maybe he wants to eat me too!” Shaymin cried out and for a brief moment, Ash was tempted to hand her over. He knew better though, and he knew that handing her over was a horrible idea.

“What do you want with Shaymin?” Dawn yelled up at him, her face screwing up with anger as she clutched the pokemon to her chest.

“He's definitely not a trainer,” Brock noted, Misty nodding in agreement.

“Giratina,” Leaf gasped suddenly, and Ash looked around at her with confusion.

“What?”

“Later.” She waved her hand at him, and Ash wanted to be a little angry but she was right, now wasn't the time for idle discussion.

“Magnezone, Mirror Shot, now!”

“Thunderbolt!” Ash cried out in response, and Pikachu didn't hesitate for a moment to unleash his electricity. When the two attacks collided, they exploded and smoke surrounded them, scattering the Magnemite and Magnetron. “Go!” Ash cried out to his friends, grabbing Misty's arm to pull her along behind him. He knew Leaf said that she shouldn't get his blood pumping or anything like that but staying there seemed like a horrible idea.

They didn't get far before the pokemon started to catch up to them. Looking over her shoulder,

Dawn cried out, "Piplup, use Whirlpool!"

"Pip LUP!" The tiny pokemon jumped into the air and launched swirling water at the Magnemite. Though they had the advantage with their electricity, Dawn wasn't aiming to win a battle. She just wanted to distract them.

They ran through the entirely wooden village that Leaf led them towards, a perfect place to avoid Giratina originally, but now that didn't really matter.

"Are you okay?" Ash yelled over his shoulder at Misty. He saw her shake her head out of the corner of his eye.

"I think I'm going to puke." Her face was a little green, but she didn't slow down, grasping his hand tightly.

They needed to hide somewhere away from the pokemon, but as the wood beneath their feet changed into stone and they went down a set of steps, Ash couldn't think of anything for the life of him. They couldn't double back and hide in one of the houses, they'd get caught for sure. "We need to get Misty somewhere!"

"The train!" Brock yelled back, pointing ahead of them.

Luck was definitely on their side. When they started running, none of them knew where they were going, they just happened to take the right route to get to the train station.

"Get on," Brock urged them as he started running in another direction. "I'll get the tickets and meet you there." Good old Brock, being practical even in a moment of panic. The last thing they wanted was to get caught without tickets on the train, kicked off at the next stop and possibly tracked down by this crazy person and his pokemon. Luckily, it wasn't busy and no one stopped them as they boarded the train, blissfully shielding them from the pokemon that were pursuing them.

Misty put her hand over her mouth, and Leaf was quick to grab her arm. She guided her away, calling out to Ash and Dawn over her shoulder. "Bathroom!" No one needed any sort of clarification. Somewhere along the lines, they all silently agreed to never leave their sick friend alone.

Brock joined them, five tickets in hand, and he wasn't a moment too soon. The train jerked to a start as it pulled away from the station, going to wherever it was they were going. It didn't really matter, as long as they were away from the person who was trying to hunt them down.

Ash stared out the window, watching the pokemon look around in confusion, though the Magnezone looked directly at the train. He sighed and leaned away from the window, letting the back of his head thump against the wall behind him. This wasn't over, and he knew it.

"Where are Misty and Leaf?" Brock asked after he caught his breath.

"She took her to the washroom," Dawn answered with a sigh. "What was—?"

"I'm hungry!" Shaymin interrupted loudly. "I loved whatever we had this morning!"

Ash, Brock and Dawn all just stared at the pokemon with incredulous looks. Ash's slowly shifted and he growled, "Are you kidding me? You poisoned our friend! We'll get you to the stupid Flower Garden, but don't act like you deserve anything from us." He pushed off the wall, turning around to walk down the train to find a seat.

There were about five other people in the train car that they managed to get on, and given the size, that gave them a lot of room to stay away from everyone else because there was no telling what would happen.

Ash moved to the end of the car just as Leaf and Misty came through the door. He frowned at them and asked, "Feel better?"

"Well I won't throw up on your shoes," Misty deadpanned, shrugging off Leaf's help as she slumped into one of the seats, resting her head against the cool glass and staring at the tress as they rushed by. "Where are we going?"

"Dunno," Ash shrugged as he sat beside her, twisting his hands together because he wasn't sure what he should be doing in this situation. "Hopefully towards the Flower Garden."

"That would be nice," she agreed, closing her eyes and pulling her knees up to her chest.

"We should keep Shaymin away from her," Leaf spoke up thoughtfully. "Misty got worse pretty quickly after she held Shaymin a second time. She could be secreting the poison still."

"But I'm not sick," Dawn pointed out, and if anyone should have been sick, it would have been her since she was the one who had been carrying Shaymin around the most.

"Hmm, good point," Leaf pursed her lips a bit then shrugged. "Keep them apart though. Just in case."

"Gladly," Ash grumbled as he glared at the pokemon in question. Pikachu and Ria mimicked his glare from where they stood on the floor, both crossing their arms. Misty didn't comment on it, though she did move a bit, showing that she was still awake.

"Leaf?" Ash looked up at the sound of Dawn's shaky voice, watching the young girl hold out Shaymin, a slight temble to her arms. "Could you hold her?"

"I don't want to go with her!" Shaymin protested.

"Please?" Dawn pleaded with her.

Leaf's brown eyes stared at her for a moment before she nodded her head and took the whining pokemon. Without a word, she turned around and walked towards the front of the train car, sitting in the farthest possible seat from the rest of them. Dawn muttered a quiet thanks and watched her go before turning and going the other way, hurrying to the next train car.

Ash frowned as he stared at the closed door and then looked around at Misty again. Her eyes were open now, and she was scowling, her cheeks a bright red compared to her paling skin. Despite that, she was trying to fend off Brock's help. It would have been funny if the situation wasn't so serious.

There was nothing he could do for Misty. She would be the same whether he sat beside her every second or not. He couldn't fix here, but there might possibly be something else he could try to fix.

"I'll be back," Ash nodded his head towards the direction Dawn went. "Pikachu, Ria, watch everyone and come get me if something goes wrong."

"Pika!"

"Rio!"

The second car was empty, apart from the blue-haired girl who was hunched over in her seat, face in hands and shoulders shaking.

His frown deepened as Ash slowly walked over to the young girl, sitting across from her. He watched as she peeked through her fingers and tensed, but he didn't prompt her to speak. They just stared at one another for a while before she had to look away.

Ash wanted to pry, to ask her what was wrong and to get it out because he could feel her distress but he couldn't read minds so he had absolutely no idea what was going on. It took every ounce of his patience not to just blurt out some sort of probing question, because he was pretty sure this was one of the situations he should wait for her to talk first.

"I don't understand," Dawn finally whispered, dropping her hands away from her puffy eyes. "She was such a...well...I just...how could Shaymin do that?" Her voice caught on the pokemon's name, coming out as more of a choking sound than anything else. "How could she? She hurt Misty so we'd take her somewhere! What kind of thing does that?"

Ash hesitated, not really sure how to answer the question. He almost pointed out that she should have listened to him but he could almost hear his mother's voice in his head telling him that it would be the wrong thing to say. He thought for a moment, understanding that she was horrified by Shaymin's behaviour but not understanding where her confusion came from.

Then it came to him.

"You know what they tell us when we leave home? What they tell parents?" Ash asked her, keeping his voice low. "There's no such thing as a bad pokemon, only bad people who make pokemon do bad things. You've heard that, right?"

"Yeah. That's what I don't understand."

Bonus, he was right! That did little to really ease his worry and guilt. "That's a lie."

"What?" Her blue eyes snapped to his and Dawn frowned. "But all the professor's say—."

"What else do you tell 10-year-olds and their parents? See, I thought that too and maybe I'm just slow but I realized lately that, it's not true at all. They can think just like us, right? Sometimes pokemon are smarter. They can be anything just like we can. Nothing stops them from being bad. Not even legendary pokemon."

She brought her knees up, hugging them to her chest as her eyes watered again. "I never thought...I'm sorry, Ash."

He reached out, putting a hand on her shoulder and squeezing comfortingly. "You have nothing to be sorry about, Dawn."

"I attacked Giratina! And...and I defended Shaymin when you knew something was up but—and now I—Misty is—I'm sorry!" Her fingernails dug into the pale skin of her legs. "How could I not see it? What's wrong with me?"

"There's nothing wrong with you. No one could have known that Giratina wasn't as threatening as he seemed and Shaymin...well...that she was." He shrugged.

"You knew." It came out as a fact, not a question. There was no uncertainty in Dawn's mind that Ash's attitude stemmed from knowing which pokemon shouldn't be trusted.

“That has nothing to do with you,” he admitted after a moment, his eyes scanning the train car that they were in, once again making sure that no one snuck in while they were talking. “I would have done the same thing when I was your age. I probably would have done the same thing a year and a half ago. Before everything changed.”

“What changed?”

Ash hesitated, weighing the pros and cons back and fourth in his mind. He sighed and leaned forward a bit so that they were completely level, keeping eye contact with her. “You can't tell anyone what I'm about to tell you. Not even Piplup when we get back. Not even your mother. It could get us all into trouble. Understand?”

She was silent before slowly nodding her head. “I won't say a word, I promise.” She liked gossip, but Dawn also knew when to keep things to herself, and she would never purposely try to hurt a friend.

Ash held out one hand completely flat in front of her. “Just watch.” A moment later, a tiny glowing orb appeared in front of them, hovering over his hand.

Dawn's mouth fell open in pure shock. “How are you doing that?”

“It's called aura. I'm one of the rare people that can use it. Rare enough to get me and my friends in trouble if someone found out. That's how I knew something was up. I can...well not read minds...it's more like extreme empathy where I can feel what people and pokemon are feeling. I can do other things too, like creating aura sphere, shields, even healing.”

“Woah,” she breathed out, eyes widening as the pieces began to click together. “That's how you helped Palkia, isn't it?”

“Yeah. Legendaries tend to find me no matter where I go, and when they do, trouble always starts.”

“That's why you didn't want to help Shaymin.” She frowned. “I'm sorry, Ash. I should have listened.”

He shrugged. “Hey, we all goof up. It's no worry.” It truly wasn't, because while she annoyed him sometimes, Ash could never truly hate his friend. “I'm sorry for being a jerk too. I've just been on-edge because of the legendaries and aura and so much. That's all.”

“It explains a lot,” Dawn sighed.

“Including the fact you shouldn't feel stupid because you couldn't have known.” Ash looked down at his hands and shook his head. “I mean, I knew Shaymin wasn't a cutsie little thing but I didn't think she'd...” He trailed off, unable to actually finish his sentence, his brow furrowing as he shifted his weight towards the isle more.

Dawn watched him, her lips pressing to a straight line before she wiped away the remnants of his tears and sat up straight. “Come on, lets get back to the others. And Ash? Misty will be fine. She herself will make sure of it and take us along for the ride.”

He couldn't help but smile weakly because Dawn was absolutely right. The redhead would definitely just carry Shaymin off if she needed to. She didn't completely need their help yet, but that didn't mean that they were about to let her go alone.

“Yeah. Lets get back.” Together, they both got up and walked into the other car. Ash's eyes went

towards Misty first. She was curled up on two seats, a pillow under her head as she slept, leading him to wonder just how long they were in there for. Brock was sitting across from her, looking through the tablet that Leaf had early that morning at breakfast. It was really hard to believe that had only been a few hours ago.

Pikachu and Ria were both balancing on the back of the seats Misty was on, acting as ever-watchful guards, even to the point where they refused to jump onto Ash's arms as he came closer. Instead, he leaned against the seats and looked down at her with worry.

"She hasn't gotten any worse," Brock answered their unspoken question with confidence, though he didn't look up. "I hope you don't mind, but I got in touch with Professor Oak. Well, Leaf did and we both talked to him."

"No, that's a great idea! What did he say?" Ash inquired eagerly, as Dawn scooped Piplup into her arms.

"He actually had information on Shaymin's poison, though he was surprised because they generally don't do this sort of thing, so apparently our Shaymin is a special snowflake all around. Leaf was right. The pollen got in her system reacting a little bit, but it would have worn off if Shaymin wouldn't have...well the easiest way to explain it is activate it when we got back. The first symptoms are quick to appear but then slow acting, so we're lucky that way." Brock frowned. "It's very unique."

"Should have seen it coming with a legendary," Dawn muttered a bit bitterly, and Brock actually looked up at her, relatively surprised.

He chose not to comment on that though. "I've never seen something exactly like it before, even reading through all the research Oak and Leaf did. He said she needs lots of sleep, we need to keep her inevitable fever down too. She'll be okay though."

"Really?" Dawn's face lit up a bit and she looked at Ash, nudging him. "See, it'll be okay!"

"Yeah." He forced a smile on his face and glanced around to where Leaf and Shaymin were. They were surrounded by the other people and pokemon on the train, and he didn't like that at all right now. "Why don't you go see what's up there?"

"Alright." Seemingly a bit chipper at the news that Misty would most likely be okay, Dawn walked away without questioning them.

Ash watched her go before turning and staring at Brock with a frown. "She'll be okay?"

"I won't lie to you," Brock's optimistic bravado instantly fell away as soon as Dawn left, "she's going to get worse before she gets better. She'll be in a lot of pain and might suffer from delusions. Hell, we should take her to a hospital but no nearby ones have any Gracidea root in stock since it can be used to cure a lot of things. Professor Oak looked into it. Our best shot to get to the Flower Garden."

"So we're stuck with Shaymin, who is apparently on the most-wanted list for a several people."

"I could take her," Ria piped up suddenly, folding her stubby arms across her chest as she looked around at the pokemon in question.

"I don't think that's a good idea," Ash replied dryly before blinking with surprise when he realized that she was using her telepathy so that anyone could hear it. He looked at Brock.



"I already know, she did it earlier," he shrugged, reaching out and taking Misty's arm into his hand, pressing two other fingers to the inside of her wrist. He was silent for a moment before putting her arm back gently. She barely stirred. "Her pulse is the same. That's good. Dawn seems better than when we first got on here too."

"I told her, about my special ability," Ash explained quickly. "So Ria can talk in front of her too. I didn't tell her about the other part though."

"The part where the legends think you're their bitch?" Ash's mouth fell open at Brock's wording and the young man's face turned red with mortification as he realized what he just said. "I'm a bit worried and frustrated right now, okay?"

"I'll say." It was actually almost amusing to Ash, and if the situation was different he probably would have laughed loudly because Brock always treated him like he was a little kid and didn't know what swearing was.

"Don't touch her!"

Leaf's sharp voice startled both boys, and they looked around to see that the brunette was standing now, holding Shaymin and tilting her body away from a pink-haired woman. The woman seemed genuinely surprised for a moment before a smile spread across her pink lips. "It's okay, I know she won't bite. She's a Shaymin, the gratitude pokemon."

"She a grass-type with the ability to use attacks such as Poison, with a unique blend of poisons in her that she won't hesitate to use on people," Leaf lectured seriously. "I'm not letting her touch anyone else."

"A Shaymin would never do that!" A plump woman wearing an orange, plaid shirt spoke up, stroking the Mewtwo sitting beside her. "Goodness, what a horrible thing to say."

He got the distinct feeling that no one would believe him if he pointed out that the grass-type poisoned Misty.

Leaf cleared her throat, bringing everyone's attention back to her. She smiled in what would seem like a bright, friendly way to most people, but Ash knew that smile from when they were young and when she was trying to (and would most likely succeed) in getting away with something. "What do you guys know about Shaymin?"

"Well," the man who came to stand beside the pink-haired woman spoke up, "I was hiking once, and I was lucky enough to see the Flower Bearing."

"Wow," a few of the kids whisper in awe.

"No kidding, you're a lucky guy!" the woman wearing orange cried out happily, startling even her own Smeargle. "That must be why you have such a cute wife!"

The young adults both appeared startled for a moment, their cheeks turning red as the man scratched the back of his head shyly.

"Why would seeing the Flower Bearing give him a cute wife?" Dawn raised an eyebrow.

"Well, you see, when Shaymin are really content, they bloom more flowers like these all over their bodies," the young woman explained, pointing at the two flowers on either side of Shaymin's head, though Leaf still refused to let her actually touch the pokemon. "They look exactly like bouquets of gracidea flowers. Show them." The woman nudged her husband, and he went back to their seat,

coming back with a basket of pink flowers with green leaves. It really did look like another Shaymin, though the colour on the flowers was slightly different.

“Are those gracidea flowers?” Dawn asked, though there was really no need since that was obvious. Piplup leaned forward to smell them curiously.

“Yes,” the older woman spoke up before anyone else could. “Around these parts, when you want to show someone your gratitude, you send them a bouquet of gracidea flowers.”

“So they're fairly common?” Leaf questioned, her eyes narrowing thoughtfully as she shifted Shaymin in her arms. The pokemon looked incredibly uncomfortable now. If those plants had the roots on them, even just a small bit of it, they wouldn't have to go to the Flower Garden anymore.

“Well, most of the year we use synthetic ones, since the real ones only bloom once a year during the Flower Bearing.”

“You don't happen to have the roots by any chance do you?” Ash asked, deciding to be completely blunt.

“The roots? Oh no, we don't. Those are just as valuable as the flower, if not more,” the woman smiled at him apologetically. She turned her attention to Shaymin. “Would you like to see the flowers up close?”

“Yeah!”

Ash's shoulders slumped and he nodded his head, not trusting himself to actually speak because there's no way he'd be able to hide his disappointment. He caught sight of how Shaymin smirked at him, and decided to walk back to where Brock and Misty were because he was sure that tossing the Gratitude Pokemon out the window would probably traumatize the kids on the train for life.

He slumped down into the seat beside Brock, staring at Misty as she slept. Pikachu jumped over from the other seat, sitting on his lap and staring up at him with worried eyes. “Pikapi?”

“I'm okay,” he stroked the pokemon's soft, yellow fur. “You just keep doing a good job watching out for her, okay?”

“Pi pikachu!” Pikachu gave him a thumbs up. His smile vanished instantly, his ears twitching as he started looking around willy. “Pika?”

“Ri,” Ria growled, eyes focused on a window half way down the train.

“What's...?” Ash trailed off, sensing a sadness grow around them. Twisted with anger, frustration, fear and so many more negative things that he couldn't put a name to, Ash instantly knew what it was.

He looked at the window, seeing his own, faint reflection and realizing that, while they escaped that person with all the Magnemite, they trapped themselves on a moving metal box, the one thing they were trying to avoid.

“Oh no.” They went through a tunnel, plunging the train car into a darkness that didn't actually bother Ash anymore. He could see in a way, but really, the only thing to see was the growing glow around Shaymin. At first it was just her aura, but then it grew visible to everyone.

“What's going on?” Misty's groggy voice jerked him back to reality. She pushed himself up, her arms shaking a bit as she looked over the seat. “Is Shaymin evolving?”

Completely distracted by whatever was happening with Shaymin and Misty waking up, Ash pushed his thoughts of Giratina to the side for now. He turned his attention to Misty, sitting beside her on the padded seat and asking, "How do you feel?"

She was going to lie, say that she was fine and he just knew it. He didn't need aura or anything like that, Ash just knew Misty well enough to know that she never wanted to be some sort of burden. Ash fixed her with a stern gaze, and her calm expression wavered just slightly. Misty honestly didn't have it in her right now to fight.

She leaned forward, her forehead pressing against the side of his arm as she shook her head. "Horrible."

"Need some water?" She nodded her head and he dug through his bag, passing her a canteen that she drank greedily.

Brock completely missed the small exchange, his eyes focused on Shaymin as her shape shifted. His brow furrowed and he said, "They don't evolve, but it sure looks like it."

The glow dissipated, and everything was silent until a slightly bigger pokemon jumped onto the back of one of the chairs. It was definitely Shaymin, but she looked overtly different.

Her fur was mostly white now, with bright green around her feet and the crest on her head. Her flower was different, a much larger single one by her ear.

"What just happened?" Ash called out to the others.

"I have no idea," Leaf squeaked out, her eyes wide and her expression genuinely shocked as she studied the new creature before them, shifting around to look at it better.

"I think she evolved," Dawn said as she studied the pokemon just like Leaf was, but it wasn't lost on Ash that she put a little more distance between herself as the grass-type than before, and her gaze wasn't nearly as open and trusting. She looked both awed and suspicious.

"No," the man holding the flowers laughed, startling both of the girls. "Shaymin change into Sky Form when they come into contact with gracidea flowers. That's part of the Flower Bearing. The Shaymin gather together at the Flower Garden and change into Sky Form. From there they fly off together to make a new garden."

Shaymin started to fly around the car, as if to prove that she could really fly. Ash shifted a bit, not even realizing that he was moving as she flew around the train car to always keep himself between her and Misty. Ria and Pikachu were doing the same. Misty sharply poked his back and raised an eyebrow at him when he looked back at her. Realizing what he was doing, Ash just shrugged.

More movement caught his attention, just a quick shift in the faint reflections of the glass, and Ash felt Giratina's presence fade slightly from a few minutes ago. He found himself able to breathe a little more because hopefully that meant that the pokemon wouldn't attack while they were inside the train. That would probably go wrong on so many levels that it wasn't even funny to think about.

"He knows a lot about Shaymin," Brock commented, breaking the teenage out of his mental fuming.

"Huh?" Was his intelligent response.

"That man over there?"

“Oh! Yeah, he said that he saw the Flower Bearing before,” Ash explained with a small shrug.

Brock was silent, staring at him incredulously.

“What?”

“Ash you idiot!” Brock groaned and slapped his forehead. “He knows where the Flower Garden is. He can tell us where to go!” Misty perked up at that.

“He can...oh...” He hadn't even thought of that.

Brock sighed and said, “You stay here with her. I'll be back.” He just shook his head and walked towards where everyone else was.

Ash felt shame well up inside of him. He should have been able to put two and two together but sometimes obvious things like that completely alluded him. His shoulders slumped and he avoided looking at Misty, Pikachu or Ria.

“Ow!” Ash rubbed his arm, staring at the newly red spot where Misty pinched it. “What was that for?”

“For being moody. Knock it off for I'll make you!” She teasingly waved her hand at him. He shook his head, smiling a little at her attempt.

“See that's why I have to go there!” Ash twisted around again to look towards Shaymin as she pranced around Leaf, Dawn and Brock. The three in question were standing by a map with the plump woman, who appeared to have been explaining something. “They won't be able to leave without me!”

“Stupid arrogant...” Misty continued to mumble under her breath, slumping back down into the seat.

“Hmm,” Ash nodded his head in agreement before randomly blurting out. “Giratina's nearby.” The redhead looked at him with alarm. “He's not really doing anything though. Just...watching.”

“Shaymin should still be careful.” For a moment it almost sounded like she was worried about the pokemon, but that faded quickly.

So focused Shaymin and Giratina's presence somewhere around them, Ash was lost in his own world until Misty jerked back with surprise. He whipped around, about to ask what was wrong, but the question died on his lips as his eyes met the cold, calculating ones of a large Magnezone, surrounded by Magnemite and Magnetron.

“Get away from the window!” Leaf cried out, and Ash looked over his shoulder to see that they were on the other side of the train too.

They were completely surrounded again, and even though they were separated from them by the metal and plastic of the train, it didn't make Ash feel more secure. If anything, they were completely trapped.

*Sky*

## Cracks And Falls

The pokemon glided around the outside of the car, poking and prodding at the windows to test them. They were in a passenger car on a train that was speeding to some unknown destination, and now they were surrounded by pokemon that didn't look friendly in the least.

"Go to the next car," Leaf whispered suddenly, never taking her eyes off of the pokemon as she walked to the door, slowly opening it. Ash was about to ask her what good that would do when she looked at the other people there. One Magnemite hit the window a little more harshly, cracking it. "Hurry."

"What do they want?" One of the children asked with fearful eyes.

"Shaymin, that's what you need to go, now," she stressed. Leaf was going to add more when a Magneton slammed through the window, sending shards of glass flying through the air. She hissed in pain as a thin cut appeared on her arm, but given that she had been blocking her eyes, it seemed like a good trade off. "Go!" She yelled at the other people, urging them through the door.

"We need to tell the conductor!" Brock yelled at Ash, but the younger boy wasn't paying attention to him. Instead, he leapt up, yanking the blanket that Misty had up over her head. He heard her protest, but didn't let her move as the windows above their heads exploded inwards.

"No change these things are getting me!" Shaymin yelled, flying around the Magnemite and Magneton in circles, causing them to slam into one another until she attacked them with a powerful green orb that completely threw them out of the train. "I'm awesome!"

"Go!" Dawn yelled at Brock. "Go warn him what's happening! We got this!"

Brock knew that she was right, but it was still hard for him to turn and run. Someone had to do it, and he was the only one that had a clear shot to escape the passenger car, so that was what he did. "I'll be back soon!"

Ash pushed himself up from where he had thrown himself over Misty, to block her from the shards of glass despite the fact that he had thrown the blanket over her. She pushed the fabric off her face when he moved, glaring at him fiercely. Catching sight of a Magnemite heading towards them though, she knew this wasn't the place to argue. "Look out!"

Ash didn't look around, instead silently trying to communicate with Pikachu what he wanted. It was times like this that Ash wished he could actually convey thoughts like a psychic, but Pikachu could usually interpret what he wanted faster than anyone else, barring Ria. Calm situations when they were training, or regular battles, were a completely different thing than being attacked while on the run.

Luckily, Pikachu understood, jumping into the air. His tail hardened, the fur shifting into a silver steel as he flipped over and slammed the pokemon back out the window. Pikachu landed neatly on the back of another chair, his expression daring any others to come closer to him.

"Wow, you're pretty strong," Shaymin commented, but Pikachu just glared at her before leaping up into the air, letting two of the Magnemite crash into one another.

Dawn ducked as one flew over her head, looking over at her starter pokemon as he jumped onto the ground beside her. Turning her attention to the Magnemite and Magneton over her, she knew that their electric-typing combined with their sheer number would beat Piplup almost instantaneously,

but she was pretty sure that they were steel-types too and if she remembered right, it didn't fair that well against water. They weren't aiming to win a battle, they were just aiming to get them away.

“Use Bubblebeam!” She called out, pointing at the pokemon. Piplup jumped up onto the back of one of the benches and unleashed a powerful beam of bubbles, the sheer force throwing the MagneMite out the window.

Ria growled as some of them got too close. Pikachu shot by, electricity surrounding him as he used his Volt Tackle to get the pokemon away. A few remained, but that didn't deter the tiny pokemon. She focused her aura, and a glowing Aura Sphere appeared in her hands. She hauled her arm back and then threw it, the attack slamming into two of the Magnemite and instantly knocking them out.

Shaymin continues to attack as well to get them to go away, but one got her pinned to the ceiling. There was a flash of red light, and then a pale purple creature appeared.

“Espeon, use Psychic!” Leaf called out, startling everyone since no one noticed her come back, and her pokemon's eyes started to glow red. The Magnemite and Magnetron all struggled a bit, but they started to glow the same red and were literally tossed out the window.

Pikachu jumped across the seats, electricity surrounding his body before streaking out the window in a powerful blast, forcing any of the other pokemon away.

Their pokemon cheered but the cheers were cut short as Magnezone slammed into one of the broken windows, trying to force its way into the train car.

Ash was going to yell for Pikachu to attack, but there was another flash and suddenly the passenger car was several-annoyed-water-pokemon fuller. Azurill, Politoed, Corsola and Spheal were all glaring at the Magnemite and Magnetron before attacking. The electric-types might have the advantage, but they were against four very annoyed pokemon. The only thing that would have made the whole situation more amusing would be if Misty unleashed her Gyarados.

The attacking pokemon were forced out of the train just as they entered a tunnel and the car plunged into darkness.

“Return.” Misty slumped down a bit as her pokemon all went back into their pokeballs, sighing and wiping the sweat off her forehead. “See, I can take care of myself.”

Ash snorted at her and shook his head with amusement as Pikachu jumped back on his shoulder. “No one said you couldn't. Doesn't mean we can't help though.”

“Every last one of them!” Shaymin said confidently as she soared through the cabin. “It's thank Shaymin time.”

“I will let Gyarados eat you,” Misty grumbled, waving her hand in front of her face. “It's getting warm in here.”

Brock, apparently just returning from the front of the train, frowned and leaned forward, pressing his hand to her forehead. “Your fever probably spiked a bit, we'll have to check that soon but I think we need to get off this train. Those pokemon know where we are.”

“Well, we know how to get to the area the Flower Garden is said to be in,” Dawn pointed out, shifting away from Shaymin a bit as the pokemon landed close to her. “We just need to get off at the next stop, which should only be in a few minutes, and then get on the ferry.”

“But then we'll be on water,” Leaf pointed out. “A reflective surface with absolutely no way to get

away from it. Giratina could just yank the whole boat into the Reverse World.”

“It'll take too long for us to walk there though.” Brock's eyes flickered to Misty worriedly. “And we don't have pokemon large enough to fly there.”

“Won't we just get attacked again on the ferry?” Misty asked, leaning her head back against the cool steel wall of the train. “Those Magnemite will probably just follow us again. What if someone gets hurt?” She didn't say it, but Ash could feel the waves of guilt rolling off of her. She thought that this whole thing was her fault.

“She's got a point,” Leaf agreed, eyeing the redhead thoughtfully. “But what if we took Gyarados?”

“Gyarados?” they all repeated.

“Yeah. That way if we notice anything weird happening in the water we can pull over to shore right away, and no one else is around to get hurt. Gyarados are fast too. Probably even faster than a ferry would be.”

“What do you think?” Ash asked Misty curiously, knowing that she was the only one that could possibly wrangle that Gyarados and it would probably just spit in their faces, or try to eat them.

Misty bit her lip in thought but then nodded her head. “Lets do it.”

...

“Is this place a part of the sea?” Dawn asked Brock from atop Gyarados, shifting a bit as she looked at the water around them. Everything was just so big there that it was hard to imagine it being anything else.

“No,” he chuckled at her. “This is isolated fresh water, it's just massive enough so it looks like a river, but it's actually once huge lake. Everything here was created by melting glaciers.”

“Melting glaciers?” Ash repeated, tilting his head curiously. “I think there's something about that in one of my classes.” He was also pretty sure that he was overdue on his test for that (he promised his mother he'd do one at least once a week, be it at a Pokemon Center or through his Pokedex), but there were more important things to worry about.

“There is,” Leaf nodded her head. “Environmental Science chapter seven. I did that one a couple weeks ago.”

Brock shook his head at the two of them and took out his guide book, leaning over the fin that he was resting on to show them a picture. “Like this. It's been wearing away at the mountain for tens of thousands of years.”

“That looks cold,” Dawn commented while rubbing her arms.

“It'd be awesome right about now,” Misty said as she wiped off her head again, leaning back and dipping her cloth into the cool water. She was sitting lower on Gyarados' back so that someone else wouldn't need to run and get more water for her. She was stubborn like that.

“Yeah, I remember that. Those were all made when Kyurem got really cranky in Unova and pretty much the whole world got icy. I mean, it was starting to happen naturally, but he sped it along. What a thankless jerk.” Shaymin lifted her head a bit from where she sat on the large crest on Gyarados' head.

"You can't possibly remember that," Brock deadpanned. "Like I said, it was tens of thousands of years ago."

Pikachu sighed loudly, getting everyone's attention. He shook his head and said, "Pikachu pi pika pika cha cu pi chu ka." He pointed at Shaymin. "Pika pika pikachu pi pikachu."

Everyone stared at him blankly while Ash just looked confused. "What's an Alpha Pokemon?"

"A what?"

"That's what he said. He said that Shaymin was alive back then because she's the Alpha Shaymin."

"I am the Alpha Shaymin," she preened. "It means I'm the boss."

Pikachu rolled his eyes and looked at Ria. "Pipi?"

Ria looked at Leaf and Dawn unsurely, and then back at Ash. He silently nodded his head, and Ria turned her attention back to Pikachu. "Yeah, I'll translate."

Though Ash told Dawn that Ria could communicate with him, she still jumped, and probably would have fallen off Gyarados if Brock wouldn't have grabbed her arm to steady her. Leaf's mouth fell open slightly as she looked at the pokemon before her eyes shot to Ash. He could practically see the questions dancing across them, and shrugged. He'd try to explain later.

"Pi pikachu pi pika..." Pikachu continued to ramble on and Ria translated for him.

"All groups of pokemon in the wild have a leader. The strongest in the group or something like that." From Pikachu's glare, it was obvious that Ria was just paraphrasing what he was saying, but she didn't care. This was new to her too. Pikachu continued speaking and she continued translating. "Those are often known as alphas of the group, but the stories say that with legendary pokemon, it means something different. The Alpha of a species of Legendary Pokemon is either the first one, or the strongest one that takes the place of the first one. Why would they—okay I'm translating! Umm...well I guess it's the one that can't be caught. Like there are some legendaries that only have one of them, like Giratina or Palkia or Dialga or Arceus but there are others with more than one, like Articuno or Manaphy or Shaymin. There's one special one that's stronger and has more powers. If the Alpha is caught that's when the world goes crazy."

Well, that explained why trying to capture the legendary birds at Shamouti Island messed up the whole world when Ash fought other trainers with an Articuno before. A part of him had always wondered about that. There was something about the explanation that didn't sit well with him though.

"Wait," his brow furrowed. "How can you be the Alpha Shaymin?" She was a little brat that acted worse than even he had when he was five, and he was pretty embarrassed of himself in most home videos.

She turned her nose up into the air. "That's why everyone should be grateful. I'm the original Shaymin. Papa-Arceus made me specially." She huffed a bit. "Pokemon changed a lot from way back then, none of them are even close to the same. There were weird types of pokemon that were both psychic and fighting types that eventually turned into you weird humans after a really, really, really long time, but I'm the same. I'll always be the same." She fixed them all with a stern expression. "I care about the other Shaymin and I lead them every year to a safe place where people can't try to hunt them or hurt them to get more gracedia flowers and roots, and don't say it won't happen it always does! So I have to get to them to protect them!"



She scowled at Ash and he was actually grateful that she didn't just blurt out that he had to help because he was the chosen one. No wonder she what he was. It was only in his imagination, but Ash could almost hear her saying 'Papa-Arceus told me that you would help because you have to it's what you're here for'. That thought made him a bit depressed.

Alpha Shaymin with a good reason for being persistent to get to the other Shaymin or not, Ash still wasn't happy with her. Explaining why it was so important to get there would have been one thing, he probably would have helped, but as he glanced down Gyarados' long body at Misty, all he could feel was anger.

The girl in question suddenly looked up, a smile appearing on her lips as she looked out over the water. "Spheal."

At first Ash thought that she was talking about her own pokemon, but then he followed her gaze and realized that there was a large group of Spheal, Sealeo, and Walrein. Of course she picked up on that. They would have to come back this way after she was feeling better, because Misty couldn't enjoy it right now and it seemed like the type of place she'd really love if she got the chance.

The pokemon swam along side them in the water, and Shaymin let out a laugh, going to fly around the pokemon. Piplup stared at the pokemon curiously before jumping off of Gyarados and swimming in the water happily.

While everyone was distracted watching the pokemon frolick and play, Leaf climbed down to where Ash was, nudging him to get his attention. She raised an eyebrow and asked, "Gonna tell me what's going on, Ashy-boy?"

"What do you wanna know, Tiny-Leaf?"

"You have a pokemon that can use telepathy and a legendary pokemon that calls you the Chosen One." He was really hoping she wouldn't bring that up, but at least she was talking quietly. "Care to explain?"

"Not really," he admitted. "Some things...it's just better for less people to know."

They went around the bend and Dawn's gasp caught their attention. Both looked up quickly to see if there was any danger but it was the opposite. Water poured from the tall mountains in clear waterfalls, rainbows arcing across the mist. Shaymin flew through the falls, soaring up into the sky where she flew with a flock of Altaria.

"It's so pretty," Misty said as she pushed herself up to see a bit better, but her happiness quickly vanished as her arm shook and she slipped back, unable to support herself.

"Misty!" Ash slid down the water-pokemon and grabbed her arm to keep her on. Gyarados stopped for a moment, looking back around at his trainer with obvious worry. It was only for a second, and then he was straightened up and swimming so fast that Dawn actually had to recall Piplup into his pokeball for a second to get him back, since he was unable to keep up. "What's wrong?"

"It started to shake and now it just..." She trailed off, cringing in pain as she leaned on him, knowing that if she tried to be stubborn, she'd probably just fall off her own pokemon.

Leaf appeared on Ash's other side, frowning as she stared at the redhead. "Muscle spasm. That's not good."

"Is it going to keep happening?" Misty asked her.

“Yes.” She didn't even try to hide it this time and then looked back at Ash. “I didn't think this would start happening so soon.”

“What does it mean?”

“It means this poison is even more unpredictable than we thought.” Leaf put all thoughts of interrogating Ash out of her mind because this was more important. Some people called her distant, and maybe she was a little antisocial at times, but she wasn't one to turn away when someone was hurt.

“What's going on? Why are you guys swimming so fast?” Shaymin asked as she landed on Gyarados' head.

“You stay up there,” Brock snapped. Just from the way he was twitching, it was obvious that he wanted to come down and help, but they were crowded enough as it was on the pokemon's back. Another person would just make it more likely that someone would fall off.

Shaymin looked down at them all, settling down and asking, “Why not put her to sleep? I could do it.”

“No!” Everyone, even Dawn, yelled at the same time, with varying degrees of alarm and anger.

Leaf took a deep breath to calm herself as she turned to Misty, speaking directly to her. “She's not wrong though. Putting you to sleep would be a good idea just for now.”

“I can't fall asleep,” Misty said miserably, her face red from fever and her entire body trembling slightly from pain. “And I'm not just going to be a useless lump getting dragged around.”

“You're not a useless lump,” Ash assured her. Normally he would have patted her shoulder jokingly, or something like that, but he didn't even want to touch her beyond keeping her from falling, too afraid that he's hurt her. There were muscles everywhere in the body, right? Touch the wrong thing and it could cause her agony, and that was the last thing he wanted.

“I was thinking more along the lines of using a pokemon,” Leaf informed her, a seriousness creeping through her voice as her brow furrowed. “Nothing with spores, like bug-type attacks, just in case. Psychic ones should be fine but...Espeon doesn't know Hypnosis. I don't even think she can learn it.” She looked at Ash. “You got any?”

“No.” For the first time, Ash found himself really, really regretting the fact that he didn't keep more of his experienced pokemon with him. He really should start rotating everyone more often, then this might not be a problem. He didn't even own a psychic-type! What kind of trainer did that make him? He thought over everyone else's pokemon and realized that none of them had anything that would work. “None of us do. Unless...Mist, does Psyduck know Hypnosis?”

“Not that he can use regularly,” she replied, closing her eyes.

Ash looked around, looking for anything that would give him an idea of what to do. The only thing he could think of was to get Gyarados to swim as fast as possible. He stared up at the sky, wishing for probably the hundredth time that he had Charizard with him. Seriously, Ash would just need to start keeping him around all the time too with how helpful he would be when legendary pokemon came around. He stared up at the Altaria still flying overhead, wishing that even the Jigglypuff that used to follow them around would pop up again.

Ash's shoulders tensed and he blurted out, “Jigglypuff!”

Everyone stared at him as if he was completely crazy. “I don't have my Wigglytuff on me, Ash,” Leaf deadpanned.

“No I didn't mean—never mind. Which pokemon can learn Sing?” He prayed that he was right, that this was one of those rare times he really, truly remembered something accurately from the pokedex. Sure he could remember typing most of the time, but listing all the pokemon that could learn a move off the top of his head? Not likely.

“Um Clefairy, Jigglypuff, Chansey, Laparas, Skitty, Swab—.” Leaf cut herself off, her head shooting up to look at the sky. “Swablu and Altaria!”

Without another word to her, Ash tossed a pokeball up, releasing Staravia. “Go up to the Altaria up there and ask if any of them know Sing. If they do, ask them to come down here!”

“Star!” The pokemon took off to the sky, flapping as quickly as he could. They all watched with bating breath as Staravia flew around the group of Altaria. A few minutes later, the flying-type came soaring back down towards them, a single Altaria following him.

The blue pokemon circled around them for a moment, tilting her head at Misty curiously and cooing sadly.

“Don't let me fall,” Misty mumbled to Ash.

“A dip in the water might cool you off.”

“I will end you when I'm better.”

Ash chuckled and let her lean on him as he covered his ears. Shaymin soared up into the sky and Gyarados ducked his head under the water, Ria, Pikachu and Piplup covering their ears along with Brock, Dawn and Leaf.

Altaria started to use Sing, it was hard to block it out, but all of them were lucky enough to be able to keep themselves awake. Once the pokemon flew away, Ash uncovered his ears and shook his head to get rid of the drowsiness. He looked down at the slumbering girl and then up at Leaf. “She'll be okay now?”

“I'll be honest with you, she's still going to be in pain,” Leaf admitted as Gyarados lifted his head from in the water, picking up speed again. “We'll notice it, but at least she'll be asleep through it. Sing will keep her asleep for a while.” She stayed silent for a moment before sighing and getting up, climbing back up the ridge of Gyarados' back so she was up towards his head.

Ash wasn't alone for long. Dawn slid down, sitting beside him. She was silent for a moment before saying, “That was really smart. With thinking like that, and with all of us here to fill in the blanks for everything else, she'll be fine. You'll see!”

“No need to worry?” Ash asked her with a weak smile.

She tilted her head at him and bit her lip. Slowly, she shrugged. “Maybe worry a bit about right now, but in the long run, there's nothing to worry about!”

His weak smile turned into a genuine one. It was hard to remember why he had been so annoyed at her lately. Maybe their training styles and personalities clashed in some aspects, but they were a lot alike, and normally it would have been him spouting out that type of limitless optimism. Honestly, even he missed that about himself. It was exhausting being so serious, sad and angry.

Ash looked up towards Brock, a bit surprised that he hadn't come down to check on them, but the young man was just smiling at him in approval. Of what, the raven-haired trainer had no idea, but it relieved him a bit to know he was doing something right for once.

...

They travelled in relative silence as the hours ticked by, the sun starting to set. It was rather beautiful, though it was hard for any of them to enjoy. It was obvious that Gyarados was tired, but the pokemon was both fiercely stubborn and protective over his trainer, and he wasn't about to stop.

Ash felt bad for feeling so restless. He wanted to be up and moving but Misty asked him not to let her fall, and it would feel wrong pawing that duty off to another person. This was the type of thing he was supposed to do, right? Help her when she was poisoned by a pokemon that had an ego bigger than Gary Oak's.

Since he wasn't moving anywhere, Ash tried to see if maybe, possibly, he could use his aura to help Misty in some way or another. He could heal cuts and physical wounds, but he never even thought about something inside the body. If he could even just soothe muscles, that would make things a whole lot easier. She was laying with her head on his lap, but her whole body was tense, twitching from time to time as she groaned in her sleep. No matter how much he tried, Ash couldn't get his aura to do what he wanted and was definitely disappointed. He was almost always able to do what he set his mind to, but of course in the moment he really needed something, it didn't work.

He distracted himself by analyzing what he could of his friends' faint auras. From what he could see, everyone has something, an individual colour to them, with varying amounts of brightness, though nowhere near his own. When he tried to see his own aura, it was actually alarming, like pale blue fire with flecks of dark blue surrounding him. Ria's was similar, though hers had more purple mixed in for some strange reason. Brock's was a warm, but very faint orange, while Dawn's was a pale pink that was slightly brighter and a little more erratic, pulsing a little more from time to time. Misty's was even worse right now, but Ash knew that the pale yellow aura surrounding her was normally fairly calm. He had all of them memorized. Leaf's was new though. Ash honestly might have laughed if her aura was green, but it was more along the lines of aqua, like her shirt, and it was slightly brighter than the others, but nowhere close to his. That might explain how intuitive she was though. She was so worried but oddly exhilarated at the same time.

Ash was confused until he remembered that not everyone went on these kind of adventures every few months. What really surprised him was when he turned his attention to Shaymin. If he was completely honest with himself, Ash was kind of wishing that he'd feel a negative, repulsive aura like the one that guy on the hover-segway had, but it wasn't at all. Maybe she was careless about people, but he could feel that Shaymin wasn't evil or inherently bad. He shifted a bit uncomfortably, because the thought that good pokemon or people could do such horrible things to others was very unsettling to him.

"Look at that!" Brock's voice broke through the quiet atmosphere so sharply that it actually made Ash jump a bit. He looked out at the water, his stomach plummeting when he saw a familiar, glowing portal appear in the water. So wrapped up in his thoughts, he hadn't even noticed Giratina coming. Then again, it was impossible for him to be aware of everything happening around him, especially when he just wasn't paying attention.

"Gyarados, can you go any faster?" Ash asked as he watched the portal grow. He tightened an arm around Misty, Dawn moving to her other side to keep her steady, holding Piplup close.

"I'm not afraid of it!" Shaymin yelled, but Leaf grabbed a hold of her so she wouldn't do something

stupid like fly forward. It didn't matter though, because a whirlwind erupted from the portal, dragging all of them, including Gyarados, inside.

Ash shifting around, pulling Misty close to him and hoping that they landed in a spot that had low gravity again because it would make the impact so much easier on him. Either way, he wasn't going to let her slam into the ground.

Dawn moved suddenly, grabbing at the belt on Misty's waist and pulling the empty pokeball off of it. She twisted a bit and called out, "Gyarados, return!" It took Ash a minute to realize what she was doing and just how smart it was. At least Gyarados wouldn't crush them when they hit the ground.

The blinding light was coming back, and this time Ria let out a painful squeal and Ash could see her covering her eyes. He felt bad about not warning her but there was really no time. He slammed into the ground first, rolling down the red dirt of a steep hill but managing to keep a hold of Misty the entire time. They came to a stop just at the edge of a steep dropoff. He groaned and opened his eyes, actively fighting off the bright aura pulsing off of everything around him.

Misty shifted a bit, her eyes slowly blinking open. She looked at him with confusion, clearly disoriented, but as she looked behind them, Misty gasped, jumped up much faster than he expected, and shoved him out of the way. Dawn crashed into her a moment later, but she actually managed to keep the small girl from flying over the edge of the cliff. Ash did the same for Leaf a moment later, but let go of her quickly to stop Brock (who was holding Ria). Brock was heavier than any of the girls, and it took much more effort on Ash's part to stop him, almost going over the edge himself.

"Pikapi!" Pikachu jumped up, sniffing Ash to make sure he was alright.

"Where are we? What happened?" Misty asked before anyone could get too sidetracked. Her eyes were wide, looking around everywhere with pure confusion.

"This is the Distortion World," Leaf answered, taking a few steps forward and letting go of Shaymin, who flew around their heads. "Giratina must have dragged us back here."

"Then where is--?" Brock's question was cut off as the massive pokemon appeared from around the edge of the cliffs. He took a step back away from it. "It's huge!"

"It looks angry," Misty added.

None of them noticed that Shaymin had taken off into the air until her Energy Ball slammed into Giratina. The larger pokemon wheeled around, glaring at the smaller one as she flew up in front of him. "Giratina!" Shaymin yelled so that everyone could hear her. "I'm challenging you!"

"Wait!" Ash yelled, but his plea fell on deaf ears. Shaymin used Energy Ball again, and it would have slammed into Giratina, but it kept going until it slammed into another floating island as Giratina faded away.

"What just happened?" Leaf asked, her hand going over her mouth with surprise. No one got the chance to answer as Giratina appeared behind Shaymin, slamming into her and throwing her into the mountain.

"I don't know but we can't let Giratina take Shaymin," Ash said through gritted teeth because he would have liked nothing more than to let that happen. Misty shifting beside him reminded him why they needed Shaymin. He threw a pokeball into the air. "Staravia. I need you to just try to distract Giratina, okay?"

“Star!” The pokemon flew up into the air, zig-zagging in front of the legendary's face without any fear. Shaymin used the distraction to fly back up, launching another Energy Ball that barely grazed Giratina's tail.

Shaymin might have been strong, but compared to Giratina, it was nothing.

Dawn looked up as the once red, rippling sky above and below them started to change, being replaced with swirls of purple and navy. “What's going on?”

“I think the sun's setting,” Brock answered, though he wasn't entirely sure because it didn't really look like there was a sun or really a sky for that matter anywhere around them.

Shaymin attacked again, but as the last rays of the distorted sunlight disappeared, her body was surrounded in a golden glow, shrinking her back into her smaller form. She yelled as she plummeted to the ground, all of her courage figuratively doing the same.

“Catch her!” Ash yelled at Staravia, because damnit, he was going to keep the pokemon alive even if it had a death wish, if only for Misty's sake. He could feel her shaking beside him, and a quick glance at her was enough to tell Ash that she was trying desperately to hide the fact that she was in pain. It was still showing through, but she didn't allow herself to fall over or cry out.

He didn't know whether to be frustrated with her or admire her strength. He chose to go with the first. “You're in pain.”

“I'm fine.”

“You're not. You can't just hide that.”

Her sea-green eyes snapped towards him, narrowing slightly. “Hypocrite. You cry like a baby over a paper cut but you could break an arm and wouldn't tell us until we force you to.” She would know that, because he had done that exact same thing before. That went on the list of things that he never told his mother and never would.

Ash knew she was right, but he didn't want to admit it. Failing to hide the pout on his face, he looked back towards the battle, still watching her from time to time out of the corner of his eye.

Staravia swung around and managed to grab Shaymin in his talons. He flew back towards his trainer quickly, dropping Shaymin to the ground in front of them.

“What just happened?” Leaf asked, eyeing the pokemon as if she was the strangest thing the girl had ever come across. Maybe she was.

“I don't know.” Shaymin's voice sounded slightly more feminine again, and much more fearful. She crawled towards Dawn, who still scooped the pokemon up even if she had misgivings. Ash didn't need to have aura to know that it was just to keep Shaymin out of trouble so they could help Misty. Dawn was so much like himself that it was scary at times, and he knew that a small part of her still wanted to help the pokemon. Ash himself had no desire to help this Shaymin, but protecting the other Shaymin was important too, so he could focus on that along with helping Misty.

“He's coming back!”

Ash broke out of his thoughts as he looked around. Giratina's body blended in with the night sky of the distortion world, making him very hard to see, they could still see the outline of his massive form coming towards them.

“Brock, you need to carry her,” Ash said quickly. He didn't have a plan in mind but they needed to go somewhere. He was pretty sure Giratina didn't mean any harm, though the pokemon was definitely much more frustrated than earlier. Still, they were on a very narrow ledge and one wrong move could have any of them spiraling off.

“I can walk just fine,” Misty snapped at him.

“Would you just shut up and listen to me?” He snapped back, and instantly felt guilty when he saw how taken back she was. He probably shouldn't have worded it that way, but they had no time to make a plan and he was just making this up as he went. “Brock, can you carry Misty on your back?”

“Yeah.” He took off his pack and squatted down, letting the reluctant redhead get on his back before he straightened up, hiking her up a bit more as he grabbed her legs to keep her steady. “Get my bag.”

Ash picked it up, but instead of keeping it, handed it to Leaf. “Lead the way and keep running, no matter what you hear.”

“And where are you going?” He should have guessed the Leaf would realize he was about to do something stupid.

“I'm going to try and distract the crazy, anger pokemon coming towards us. So go.” Giratina swooped overhead, actually attacking this time. Blue fire slammed into the cliffs beside them, throwing rocks and dust everywhere. “GO!”

Maybe there was something in his voice, or maybe it was just because they were being attacked by an enraged legendary, but no one else protested. Leaf still fixed a glare on him as she started running, with Dawn (carrying Shaymin) and Brock (carrying Misty) behind him.

“Pika,” Pikachu mumbled to Ash.

“What's the plan?” Ria asked him, tensing up as Giratina circled around again.

“Staravia,” the flying-type said as he landed.

“What's the plan?” Ash asked as Giratina drew closer. He thought back to when Palkia and Dialga were fighting in Alamos Town. “Something stupid.”

Without warning, he ran towards the edge of the cliff, and just as Giratina passed by, he jumped.

*Sky*

## Introspective

Leaf Green had been born to a broken life. Her mother, Amanda Green who had simply gone by her surname to most people, hadn't given her much for expectations to live up to. Sure, she was an amazing trainer with powerful pokemon, but she obtained her first pokemon, a Squirtle, by stealing it. Oddly enough, the woman had been a very over protective mother, choosing to stay in Pallet Town instead of going somewhere else. Leaf hadn't really known her father, Kene Shade, though she had vague memories of him coming home from time to time until he just vanished. Her mother hadn't told her that he was killed, but she found out eventually and a small part of Amanda's overprotectiveness made a bit of sense.

The only people she really interacted with when she was young was other adults and Gary Oak, who was the son of her mother's friend, John Oak (her mother called him Blue, and when she was younger, Leaf had no idea what that meant but rolled with it anyway). Being around adults who would often try to dismiss her or talk down to her, Leaf was quick to pick up skills in eavesdropping and reading body language. She was a serious child who spoke and acted like an adult.

Until the day she met Ash Ketchum. Sure, she knew who he was, everyone in Pallet Town knew everyone, and she knew that he was friends with Gary too, but she never really got to play or interact with him all that much.

She would always remember the day she first really met him. Ash walked right up to her, held out his hand and said, "Hi, I'm Ash Ketchum and you're my friend now." Of course, he stumbled horribly over his last name but that didn't matter. Not even Gary actually said that she was his friend before that. Being friends with him let her act like a child. All games were designed to have only three players, no more, no less.

Her mother sheltered her like an ever looming shadow blocking the sun for all the right reasons but going about it in the wrong way. Gary challenged her, pushed her to be the best that she could be to compete with him. Ash let her be completely free to be anything and everything she wanted to be without judgement and only encouragement.

She's been born into a broken life and even at a very young age, thought that she had to pick up all the pieces herself, but Ash and Gary taught her otherwise. It was really thanks to them that she pushed herself hard enough to become more than what was expected of her. She earned the privilege of getting to leave Pallet when she was ten, she earned her pokemon, and she did it by her own merits without being forced to cheat, lie and steal.

Until they were eight-years-old and everything changed. The pieces weren't exactly broken, but they were fractured and she had no idea how to repair them on her own, and while Ash tried to help, he really did, Gary refused and two people alone weren't enough to fix things. Then she gave up.

Something always felt broken to her. It was something Leaf couldn't really comprehend as she went on her own journey, not exactly sure what she wanted to do with her life but eager to explore the world. She trained her pokemon to be the best, though she didn't feel the urge to jump into the competitive leagues right away, and contests definitely weren't her thing either. She just wanted to learn about it all and that's what she did.

She met Joey, the fourth kid that left the same day she did, and was a bit wary of how disturbed he had become. A part of her was just glad that she hadn't become unhinged, talking about perfect



Rattata and trading his starter pokemon for one. She knew that so many kids did end up right back home.

Then Leaf met Ash again. It had been well over two years since they last saw each other, though she had heard that he was off exploring other regions, so it had been a bit of a shock to see him again. It was even more of a shock to see him instantly smile when he realized who she was and talk to her like no time at all had passed. That reminded her of the broken feeling and realized that while she had given up on ever repairing the friendship that the three of them (including Gary) had, a part of Ash hadn't and he was quick to welcome her back.

Some people said that Gary was the brains and she was the instincts, but Leaf knew without a doubt that Ash had to be the heart. There'd been something refreshing about seeing her old friend again and knowing that he still was a friend that made it easier for her to escort Joey to Johto. It gave her the courage to reach out to Gary again too. If Ash didn't give up, she shouldn't have either. Surprisingly, Gary seemed willing to reach back to her this time, and she was sure that Ash beating down his ego at the Silver Conference had something to do with it.

Leaf hadn't expected to meet Ash again in Sinnoh in the strangest set of circumstances ever. It wasn't just the whole Shaymin and Giratina thing that was strange, it was Ash himself. She knew what broken looked like, and that's what he was, no matter how much he tried to hide it. It wasn't because of his friends, that much was obvious, but she couldn't tell what was wrong.

Though Leaf's goal was to secure information on where gracidea root could be readily found, a small part of her continued on with this crazy adventure for him alone. He helped her when she felt broken, even if he didn't realize it, and she wanted to do the same.

Whatever insane schemes he was up to now, Leaf would just have to trust him. She'd known bits and pieces about Ash since they were very young (they often joked that they met each other only days after she was born), and she knew how much he valued the people he cared about. It was the least she could do to try and lead them to safety.

Giratina wasn't pursuing them anymore, Ash's distraction, whatever it ended up being, apparently worked.

Leaf yelped and skidded to a stop, grabbing onto the rocky wall beside her. Just around the corner that they turned, the ledge abruptly caught off and she almost went over her. Dawn collided into her, but Brock managed to stop on time. Good thing, with Misty's added weight, he probably would have fallen over.

"What now?" Dawn asked, her dark blue eyes scanning the ledge for a way down. Down to where, she didn't know, but anywhere away from Giratina was good.

"Hello!" A voice yelled out suddenly, startling all of them. "Dawn! Leaf! Up here!"

Twisting around, Leaf looked up a path that she completely overlooked before, probably because it twisted up onto the ceiling, but there, standing upside down and waving was Newton.

"Newton!" Dawn cried out in relief, leading the way up towards him, not worried at all about the path twisting upside down.

Leaf nodded for Brock to go next. She wanted to go last just in case something happened and she needed to catch him or Misty. Unlike Dawn, Brock did hesitate running all the way up, and Misty just looked around with pure confusion.

“This isn't a place people usually come back to,” Newton noted when they caught up to him.  
“What are you running from?”

“Giratina was going to eat me,” Shaymin whined from in Dawn's arms.

Seeing that Newton was looking around for the massive pokemon, Dawn added, “Ash is distracting him. Oh, and this is Brock and Misty.”

He acknowledge them with a nod and then said, “Well, if he's only going to infuriate Giratina more, we should get you guys somewhere safe. I'll go find him after that. Your friend there doesn't look too good.” He nodded towards Misty, who just groaned in reply and let her head fall onto Brock's shoulder, shaking it a bit as if she was answering him.

“So, you guys are going to get him, right?” Shaymin asked as they walked through a dark tunnel, lit with only glowing green light. “I kinda need him to take me to the Flower Garden.”

“I don't get why you need Ash to take you to the Flower Garden,” Leaf said, not bothering to look back, “but we're not going to leave him here.”

“What happened to all that confidence you had in Sky Form anyway?” Misty asked, looking up at the pokemon with narrowed eyes.

“I left it back in the sky.”

“Of course you did,” she groaned and then looked back over her shoulder in the direction they came from.

“He'll be fine,” Leaf muttered to her quietly. “He's Ash, he won't do something too stupid.” Misty raised an eyebrow at her, and Leaf made a face when she realized just how wrong her words were. He'd come back, of that they were both sure, but in how many pieces was another story.

...

Ash Ketchum had never been afraid of heights. He had been the type of baby to quickly get the concept of dragging himself around, only to practically skip over crawling before he started walking, and after that it seemed like he was running in no time. On the other hand, he was quite a bit older than the average baby when he actually started talking (retaining words and understanding, but just never having much to say until he randomly asked his mother one day if he could have a pokemon).

He had been the child that climbed over everything no matter what people put in his way. His crib became useless, and baby gates were simply a challenge to him. He had more than his fair share of sprains, bruises and the occasional broken bone from learning how to climb but not exactly figuring out how to get down on his own. Over time, he learned that the best way to do it was to get himself in a position where he wouldn't hurt himself too badly, and just jump.

Other people questioned his tendency to lean really far over the ledge of high places, or how he wasn't bothered at all while flying around on the back of a speeding pokemon, or how he would toss himself over the edge of a very steep drop in order to help someone else.

Sometimes he questioned himself too, but he still did it. Thinking and worrying about everything lately had only made him bitter and cranky, and in that moment where he threw himself off the edge of the cliff, his pokemon crying out in horror behind him, he didn't have a plan. He went with his gut instinct, and falling down, he couldn't remember the last time he had felt more free.

He managed to grab onto Giratina's back, but he hadn't anticipated the fact that the pokemon was smooth. It wasn't like touching skin or scales or even fur, it was something indescribable really. Whatever it was though, Ash couldn't hold on. He slipped back, barely able to gasp as he scrambled to hold on.

He wasn't afraid of heights, but he also wasn't exactly a fan of landing.

Ash didn't have long to wonder if he'd ever find anything to actually crash into (it kind of just looked like all directions went on forever). Giratina grabbed him, wrapping his tail (Was it a tail? Ash was going to call it that, because Giratina was more like a snake at the moment than anything else) around him and twisting around so that he was staring directly at Ash.

It didn't occur to him that Giratina could have easily crushed him. The pokemon was absolutely huge in comparison, and he could kind of understand why Shaymin's first thought was that Giratina was going to eat her, because it was actually pretty terrifying to look at.

He shifted a bit, staring into those massive red eyes. There was so much Ash wanted to say and clarify, but he didn't really know where to start. He could have called out to his pokemon to assure them that he was okay, but that thought didn't occur to him either.

Instead he just held up a hand and said, "Hi."

Giratina tilted his head to the right in reply.

"Um," Ash looked around and then shrugged. "Nice world you got here?"

Giratina tilted his head around to the left.

"Okay, well, do you think you could not hunt down my friends? I know you need Shaymin and you know, I'd give her to you, she's a pretty big jerk, but she hurt Misty—that's my girlfriend...but you're a legendary pokemon you don't care about that. Anyway, we kind of need her. So if you could just not hunt us down, that'd be great."

Giratina stared at him, and Ash was close enough to see his giant pupils dilate at the mention of Shaymin hurting Misty. The pokemon made a very unhappy noise and shook his head, and it honestly kind of reminded of when Brock would shake his head because he thought he was being ridiculous.

"Giratina," Ash mumbled, reaching out and putting his hand on the pokemon's skin. "I know that you're trapped and you just want out. I bet you never asked to be here alone, and now you can't leave, you can't escape." He looked away. "But I'll help. You know I will. I'm supposed to. Please, just let us keep Shaymin."

Giratina cooed, and Ash could feel the curiosity pulsing off of it. He was a bit surprised that the legendary wasn't using telepathy, but then again, neither had Palkia or Dialga. There was also something else, something like disapproval at his words.

"I'm telling the truth. I'll help." He could feel certainty coming from Giratina, so it wasn't that statement that had the pokemon confused. "Let us keep Shaymin?" No that was pretty clear too. "I'm supposed to help?" There it was. Giratina didn't approve of that thought at all. "As the Chosen One, don't I have to help? I don't have a choice. That's what Darkrai and Shaymin told me." He was expecting another feeling to interpret or translate, but that wasn't what he got. Giratina clearly shook his head. "Huh?"

Giratina looked up suddenly, staring at something in the distance. He chirped unhappily and

twisted around, dropping Ash onto his head and then moving a bit up to where Pikachu and Ria were waiting with Staravia. Ash recalled Staravia and held out his arms for his other two pokemon. Then he gasped, grabbing onto the crest on Giratina's head as it flew away.

...

Misty Waterflower was in absolute misery, though she was trying desperately to hide it. She was sure that Brock knew though. Not only was he the one carrying her, but he had known her for years. Being the overprotective brother-figure that he was, she was sure that he would call her out on how horrible she was feeling.

"Let me down."

"You sure?"

"Yeah."

She tried to stand when Brock lowered her to the ground, and managed to do it for a moment, but then her shaking knees gave out on her and crumbled to the ground. She didn't even actually feel her collision with the rocks beneath their feet. Someone may have yelled her name, but she wasn't really paying attention to it.

She was so cold, feeling like there was ice creeping through her veins, though they kept telling her that she was burning up. Her muscles were sore and numb at times, is she had eaten recently she probably would have thrown it up, and her heart was beating painfully in her chest.

Misty didn't want to admit it, but she was absolutely terrified. She prided herself on being proud and strong, of being able to defend herself without question from anyone else. She didn't need anyone to make her feel worthy or complete anymore. She didn't need anyone else to validate who she was and what she wanted.

As she laid on the ground with her friends looking over her, Azurill popping into her point of view, she realized that though she didn't need anyone in that aspect, she still really wanted all of them with her. She wanted her pokemon. She wanted her long-gone Toggetic. She wanted Delia Ketchum, who had always been a mother to her. Hell, she even wanted her sisters. She also wanted Ash. The unselfish part of her thought that maybe it was better that he was gone for now though. He would be fretting and panicking and just being his general self when he couldn't help a friend in need.

Managing to focus again as someone forced her to drink some water, Misty blinked with confusion because what the hell was Team Rocket doing there? They better not try to steal her pokemon. Her pokemon. What would happen to them if that frantic beating in her chest suddenly stopped.

That was when Misty began to panic. She jerked up, her limbs screaming in protest. Brock put his hands on her shoulders to try and get her to lay down again (that's what he said, at least), but she resisted. "Brock. My pokemon. Do you think Ash..." She had to stop talking for a moment, trying to keep herself from throwing up the water that she'd been drinking.

"Ash will be fine. So will your pokemon," he assured her.

"No, not that. Do you think Ash will...that he'll take care of them for me?"

Brock didn't answer right away, his face twisting so he almost looked like he was in pain. "Don't worry about it. He won't have to. You'll be fine."

“But if I'm not—.”

“You will be.”

“If I'm not—.”

“He will,” Leaf interrupted before Brock could argue with her. “He'll train them and make them the strongest water pokemon in the world.”

That calmed Misty down a bit and she could feel herself smiling as she nodded. “Good. That's what I want.”

It took a little while, but Misty allowed herself to fall asleep. At least in her dreams there was no pain.

...

Brock Slate was on edge, though that wasn't exactly an uncommon thing with him. He was the oldest, the one responsible for everyone else. He didn't just cook and clean and act as a guide with maps and tour guides, he tried to teach his much younger friends about these different tasks too and how important they were. He learned a lot about them through that. Ash could actually be a decent cook when he tried, but he was generally much too distracted to bother and Mew-forbid he get his hands on a map. Misty should never be trusted in or around a kitchen but she was very organized. Dawn, well she was still young and had a lot to learn, but her poffins were turning out great, and she was the type to clean up her messes. Despite all of this, Brock sometimes felt much too overwhelmed and slightly bitter. He honestly tried not to, he was out fulfilling his dream, but sometimes he just didn't want to be the responsible one.

Back when it was just Ash and Misty with him, he actually found it easier to get distracted and do his own thing. Sure, the two of them would fight like it was nobody's business, but at the end of the day they would always try to keep each other out of harm. It became a little more difficult with May and Max. Sure, Ash was growing up too and he definitely looked out for them, but they were younger and couldn't always keep up with the raven-haired teenager to get him out of trouble. That became a little more obvious with Dawn.

They went through more band-aids, gauze, slings, casts and medicine than anyone really had the right to, but that was the life of a traveling trainer, even when they were in groups. Knowing that a pokemon, a legendary pokemon at that, was manipulating them but harming one of his friends was really too much for him though. Brock found himself fretting and trying to check on her more than she appreciated.

A small part of him blamed himself for this. He told himself over and over again that he couldn't have made a difference, but there was that tiny, nasty voice in his head that whispered that he had been with her all day after she was first exposed to the spores that poisoned her. He noticed her red skin, thinking it was a sunburn over a fever. He noticed her fatigue but put it up to how exhausting the situation was.

“Let me down,” Misty spoke up suddenly. He was going to argue, but she was already shifting around, and as long as she didn't move to far, he figured it wouldn't be a big deal.

His attention quickly diverted when three very familiar voices cried out, “Welcome back, Master, sir!” He blinked with surprise when he saw Jessie, James and Meowth bound forward, having forgot that they too were pulled into this strange world earlier that day.

“We got you some cool stuff!” Meowth cried out happily, and Newton honestly sounded curious.

“How about a hot towel?” Jessie offered, her voice oddly sweet as James bent down so Meowth could pour some water into the cup he was holding.

He stood back up and held it out, “Something to wet your whistle?”

“Well thank you, thank you,” Newton nodded his head in appreciation as he took the towel to clean off his face, then accepted the drink.

“Team Rocket?” Dawn asked slowly, shifting Shaymin in her arms and staring with confusing.

Leaf put her hands on her hips and raised an eyebrow. It didn't take a genius to realize that she recognize the name of the infamous crime syndicate.

“What are you doing here?” Brock demanded, shifting a slightly so that he was shielding Misty a little bit. While Jessie, James and Meowth had proven several times that they weren't exactly completely horrible people, helping out whenever the urge hit them, Brock wasn't about to trust them.

Jessie threw out her hands and said, “It's it obvious that we've becoming his star pupils?” She put her hands on her hips and smirked at them.

“His trio of Reverse World wonks,” James added with a similar flourish of his arms, though Brock had no idea what that meant.

Meowth rolled his eyes and tilted his head so that the distracted Newton wouldn't hear him say, “Actually, we just go and get him junk.” Well, there was a believable explanation.

Brock wanted to warn Newton that these two were no good, that he should be more worried, but he never got the chance. A soft thud made him whip around, and fear instantly consumed him when he realized that Misty was laying on the ground, her whole body shivering as goosebumps rose on her paler-than-normal skin, her cheeks a bright red.

He cursed as he knelt in front of her, feeling her racing pulse. He shifted her so that she was laying on her back and put his hand to her forehead. “She's burning up. We need water.”

Surprisingly, Meowth was quick to offer up the water bottle that he had been holding. He tilted his head curiously and then said, “She don't look good.”

“You think?” Leaf snapped, speaking up for the first time. “Dawn, could you-?”

“On it,” Dawn interrupted, tightening her grip on Shaymin and hurrying by a very confused Jessie and James. Though Misty never touched Shaymin, keeping the small pokemon away was probably the best idea. Even if it was just so Brock wouldn't strangle her.

And that was coming from level-headed, responsible Brock, not easily-angered Misty, or look-before-leaping Ash.

At some point of time, he didn't know when exactly, Azurill popped out of her pokeball to stare at her trainer sadly, nuzzling her a bit. Azurill used to know Refresh, but that type of move was usually ineffective on people, and Misty mentioned that she hadn't been able to do it for a while now. It would have been helpful to at least try of it were possible. Brock got the feeling that Azurill was thinking the same.

Misty suddenly jerked up, startling Leaf, Azurill and Brock. The oyung man put his hands on her shoulders and tried to push her back down gently. “You need to pay down and rest.”

Her eyes darted to him, lost in a feverish haze. “Brock. My pokemon. Do you think Ash...” She trailed off, like she was struggling to remember what she wanted to say.

“Ash will be fine,” he assured her as comfortably as he could. “So will your pokemon.” Leave it to Misty to be worried about everyone else when she was sick. Seriously, that was one of the things that he, Misty and Ash all had in common, though sometimes some of them took it to greater extremes than the others.

“No, no that.” Misty looked around again, as if searching for answers. “Do you think Ash will...that he'll take care of them for me?”

Brock stared at her, feeling something breaking inside of him when he realized just what she was talking about. The thought made him sick and he wanted to completely forget it. She was already wondering what would happen to her pokemon if she didn't make it. “Don't worry about it. He won't have to. You'll be fine.” He tried to sound like he was reassuring her, but maybe he was trying to reassure himself even more.

“But if I'm not—.” She protested.

“You will be,” he interrupted almost viciously, not wanting to hear another protest from her.

“If I'm not—.” Of course she was going to be stubborn.

Brock was about to argue, but a hand on his shoulder made him stop. He looked around at Leaf, watching her shift closer as she said, “He will.” Her voice was so confident, as if she was reading the response right from Ash's mind. “He'll train them and make them the strongest water pokemon in the world.”

Misty visibly calmed down, a smile appearing on her face as she nodded her head. “Good. That's what I want.” She relaxed more, letting her eyes flutter shut.

“What gives you the right to tell her that?” Brock snapped, the words flying out of his mouth before he could actually stop them.

Leaf shook her head and glared back at him. “I know you're being all big brother here, but arguing wasn't helping. She just needed to relax so I told her what she wanted to know.” Leaf looked away and added, “I'm here to try and help her now, not to make you feel better.”

“So what happened to the twerpette?” Jessie suddenly interrupted.

Brock wanted to yell at Leaf for her insensitivity, but he knew she was right.

“Shaymin!” Dawn's shriek echoed down the cavern, startling everyone.

Leaf jumped to her feet and said, “I'll go.” Though she didn't say the rest, Brock understood that she meant she'd go so that he could stay with Misty. She didn't wait for any confirmation of this plan, tearing off down the cavern as quickly as she could.

Team Rocket just stared at the girl before James finally asked, “Who's that, and what's going on?”

Brock just shook his head and looked down at Misty. “Come on Ash, whatever you're doing, you better get back here soon.”

...

Dawn Berlitz had always been an optimistic girl. She was bright, cheerful and always tried to make others see the bright side of things. Though she could get down on herself, it was unacceptable for others to be like that. Maybe that was why she clicked with Ash so easily, despite their four year age difference. Even moreso with Brock, who was a whopping nine years her senior. Yet she looked to them as older brothes and mentors, something to aspire to. She was so sure of her dreams and herself at the beginning. She thought she knew the type of world she was walking into.

How wrong she had been. Dawn wondered if all trainers went through that moment where suddenly what they expected became a memory of the past and what actually was consumed them. That revelation hit her quick and hard, but she got the feeling that it took others a while to see it. She herself saw the grim acceptance that eventually overtook Ash as something made him realize the world wasn't quite as bright as he thought, and that was after four years of who knows what going on. Funnily enough, the reason she realized it so quickly was because of him too.

That wasn't to say that the world wasn't still bright and cheerful. No, there was so much good in the world too that all of the unexpected darkness truly made it stand out. Of course, she was starting to see that maybe there really wasn't such thing as black and white, that the way to really look at the world was in the spectrum between.

Dawn walked down the green-lit cavern numbly, Piplup walking by her side as she carried Shaymin, the very pokemon that was making her question so much.

"I'm hungry," Shaymin said to Dawn startling her out of her thoughts. "Gimme food."

"We don't have any food," she replied, frowning as she side-stepped some rocks that she was about to trip over.

"But I'm hungry."

"And that's not going to make food magically appear!" Dawn finally snapped, shifting Shaymin so that they were staring at one another. "I don't understand! You're adorable and you're a legendary pokemon and I thought you were just hurt and needed help but...you've been selfish and greedy and nothing that anyone should be grateful for." Her face twisted up like she was physically in pain. "I know you want to get to your friends but, why? Why did you do it?"

Shaymin jerked around and finally got out of Dawn's grip, landing on the ground rather gracefully. "I don't have to answer you."

"You don't have an answer, do you?" The young girl couldn't hide her disappointment. Ash was right, some pokemon just weren't inheritable good.

Without warning, two Magnemite appeared out of nowhere, going on either side of Shaymin and scooping her up, flying away. Though Dawn was so disappointed and sad about the pokemon, they still needed her to find the exact location of the Flower Garden to save Misty. "Shaymin!" Her voice echoed all around her, and she ran after the pokemon.

Skidding to the edge of a cliff, Dawn stared up with wide eyes at the man from before, hovering in the air on his strange floating thing. Her fingers reached back, touching the part of her bag where she could easily access her pokeballs from, but hesitated because her pokemon weren't excessively strong. She doubted they'd hold up in a fight.



“Dawn, what...” Leaf trailed off as she came to a stop at the young girl's side. She scanned the scene quickly, and though Dawn didn't know her like she knew Misty or May, she had to admire her in that moment. So calm and already analyzing the scene at hand.

“Shaymin,” Leaf pointed up, locating the pokemon. “Where'd this guy come from?”

“We need to get her back to help Misty,” Dawn muttered, borderline hysteric.

Leaf's eyes narrowed. “And we will.” She reached to her bag, unclipping the oldest-looking pokeball and throwing it into the air. The light that burst out revealed a massive green creature with a pink flower on its back.

“Venusaur!” Leaf called out. “You know what to do!”

“Ven!” The pokemon's vine whip's launched out, slapping Magnemite away and wrapping around the ones holding Shaymin.

“Fight back!” the man yelled, and Venusaur was swarmed. That didn't stop the pokemon from hitting everything within reach.

“How does he know what to do?” Dawn asked in awe.

“He was my first pokemon,” Leaf answered, a small smirk to her lips. “He might not be able to ride around on my shoulder, but it's the same as with Ash and Pikachu.

“No, it can't be,” Newton whispered in shock as he appeared behind them. “Zero.”

*Sky*

## Getting There

Ash looked around the eerily quiet Reverse World, not understanding where his friends had vanished to. It felt like he had been flying around on Giratina for hours trying to find them. He had to twist his hat backwards so the wind wouldn't make it flip off his head. Though the legendary pokemon moved quickly, Ash didn't fear falling off. He found it oddly easy to shift with Giratina's movements, despite the fact that his attention kept shifting to the strange things he saw as they flew.

There was an upside down pyramid that he was pretty sure was made of gold, massive ice pillars that rose up to the sky as far as he could see, oddly twisting mountains that he was pretty sure defied physics (making a note to himself that he should probably catch up on his online science class as soon as all the insanity was over with), and so many bubbles that reflected the real world.

Though it was still much more vivid, brighter than the real world, Giratina had done something to make the aura of the Reverse World easier to deal with. He no longer had to actively try to shun the aura assaulting his eyes, and that made observing this amazing place so much easier. If his friends weren't potentially in danger, he might have enjoyed flying around there. Reality was, Misty was getting worse and they needed to get back to their world soon to help her.

Pikachu hung onto Giratina, looking around with the same curiosity, though Ria had her head buried in Ash's jacket. Ash really wanted to put her back in her pokeball after she almost toppled off of the legendary pokemon, but she refused to go in. Their compromise was that he would hold onto her, rather than letting her wander around on Giratina's head like she wanted to.

A loud chirp broke Ash out of his thoughts, and Giratina turned suddenly. He yelped and held onto the pokemon, shifting forward a bit when his flying stabilized and asked, "What's wrong?"

Giratina chirped again, and Ash could tell that he was worried, and a bit angry. Giratina flew around the cliffs easily, and then gracefully came to a stop at the entrance of a cavern. He nodded his head, and Ash asked, "You want us to go in there?"

A nod.

Pikachu took the leap first, landing easily on the grass and waving to Ash. He held Ria close as he jumped, realizing that the gravity in the area wasn't quite as strong as normal. He looked back around to Giratina. "What's wrong?"

He nodded towards the entrance.

"Trouble's in there?"

The pokemon tilted his head unsurely. Ash sighed and placed his hand on the wall. It was always easier to focus when he was actually touching something, following the natural flow of aura in the earth and 'reading' what else was there, but it was more subtle to just try to do it on his own.

It took a moment, the lights really were so bright, but then he felt them and his eyes lit up. "Misty! Brock!" He turned to thank Giratina, but the pokemon was already flying off.

Something was wrong, he knew that instinctively, but Giratina brought him to his friends for a reason. His brow furrowed and his lips pressed together before he looked at his pokemon. "Lets go."

The cavern was dark, only lit up by eerily familiar glowing crystals, so much like the ones at the Tree of Beginning. At least there was some form of light to guide his way. Ria was bounding ahead of him, taking two leaps for every one that Pikachu had to take, but the yellow pokemon never let himself get too far ahead, stopping from time to time to wait for her.

A strange feeling welled up inside of Ash, a type of nervousness and excitement that made his stomach twist uncomfortably. He wanted to see his friends so badly, but he already knew that Leaf and Dawn weren't with them, and that they were staying in one spot. It was good, because he didn't have to go on some type of wild Psyduck chase, but bad because they weren't moving for a reason, and he really dreaded what that reason was.

He didn't need to sense their auras, to see them, to know that something was really wrong.

Ash was so distracted by his thoughts that he didn't realize he ran right onto one of the crystals when he was about to go around a corner. The sudden lack of friction combined with his speed made it hard for him to stop, and he ended up sliding and slamming into the rocky wall, flopping back onto the cave's floor with a rather stunned expression on his face.

Pikachu and Ria appeared in his vision, staring at him with worry. He blinked a few times before shaking his head and pushing himself up. "I'm good."

"That's certainly one way to make an entrance." Brock's words were sarcastic, but there was only a grim seriousness to his voice. Ash twisted around, looking into the direction of the sound. His breath caught in his throat as he caught sight of his friends, quickly getting up and scrambling over to them.

Brock was kneeling down beside Misty, putting water from a canteen onto a cloth and then placing it on her head. Everyone about him was tense and frustrated, and Ash could see why. Misty looked absolutely horrible, her face red and her chest heaving. She was sweating, and Ash didn't need to touch her forehead to know that she was burning up, but at the same time, she was shivering, her face twisted into an expression of pain.

"We need to get her out of here," Brock spoke, and Ash was sure that if he tried to argue, the young man would have hit him. "I don't know if this world is making her worse, but the info said this would be slow moving, and it's accelerating much too rapidly. She needs those roots and she needs them now."

"Yeah," the raven-haired teenager agreed, reaching out to touch her forehead and grimacing at the heat. "How though?"

"You tell me," Brock snapped at him.

"Huh?" Ash was completely taken back by his tone.

"You're the one who gets all buddy-buddy with legendaries, the one who gets dragged into their schemes and you pull us with you, so of all people, you're the one who should be able to figure out how to get us home before your own freaking girlfriend dies." Brock's expression dropped almost immediately. "I'm sorry, Ash. I just..." He tried to reach out, but Ash flinched back a bit like he expected Brock to just lash out physically next.

Then again, people had a tendency to do that to Ash, even though he always just smiled and shrugged it off later on.

Shame welled up within him, and suddenly Ash felt like he didn't deserve to be there with them at

all. He looked down at Misty, watching as she shifted, her image blurring as tears covered his eyes. He wasn't going to let them fall, because he didn't deserve to cry. Brock was right about everything.

He sniffed, trying to blink the tears away as he asked, "Where are Leaf and Dawn?" His voice wavered as he spoke, and he mentally scolded himself. A couple angry words weren't the end of the world, yet they were the first thing to get him upset in this way so far.

"You just missed them. Dawn took Shaymin away but then we heard her yelling Shaymin's name. Leaf went to look for her." Brock stood up, brushing off his pants as he did. "Look, I'm just stressed. I know you don't know anymore than I do. I'm going to catch up to them and see if anything's really wrong. You work on getting her up. We need to go."

Ash nodded his head, not having the heart to argue with him. He looked down at Misty, not speaking until he knew that Brock was gone. He let out a puff of breath and said, "This is my fault, and that's why I'm going to get you out of this. You just gotta wake up, Mist." He gently shook her shoulder, a slight smile appearing on his face as she moved. Good, she wasn't nearly as unconscious as he worried. "Come on, up. You always growl at me for sleeping in, don't be a hypocrite." He paused, waiting to see if she would wake. "If you don't get up, I'm taking a picture and sending it to your sisters cause you look bad right now."

"I will end you," Misty's tired voice reached him before she slowly forced her eyes open. It took her a moment to take in her surroundings before she focused on him. "Where are we?"

"Some cave in the Reverse World. Didn't get the details but I'm ninety-nine percent sure you fainted. Like a little wuss."

"Shut your face. You'd faint from a tiny Tentacool sting." Ash made a face at her, and Misty realized what she said, genuinely appearing embarrassed. "Oh, right. Deathly allergic to those. Bad example."

He shook his head and reached out, looping his arm around her back to help her sit up. Misty groaned in discomfort, but she managed to hold herself up.

"I'm not going to ask if you're okay, but do you think you can walk?" His face faltered. "Not that I think you're weak and need help, or anything."

Misty sighed, her shoulders slumping. "I feel awful, and I know I need help. I want to walk, but I could use your help." Ash blinked down at her with surprise, and Misty's cheeks turned pink with something other than sickness. She wasn't one to admit something like that, and he was flattered that she was willing to be completely honest with him. "We should go and find everyone else."

He nodded his head, getting up himself and then carefully helping her to her feet. She stumbled, grabbing onto his arm to keep herself up before nodding to him. She kept one shoulder around his arm, and he kept one around her waist to help her walk. A part of Ash thought that he should give her a Spink-back ride, but he had a feeling that she wasn't going to settle for that again. The poison was going to rush through her no matter what she did right now.

Pikachu and Ria had stayed completely silent and out of the way during their entire exchange, watching silently as the two interacted. Pikachu hopped up and scurried ahead of them, while Ria carefully walked at her trainer's side.

"Misty?" The redhead looked down at the small pokemon, a little bit startled at being directly addressed by her. "It'll be okay. You'll see! I'll even punch Shaymin for you!"

“Aww, you're a sweetie,” Misty cooed at the pokemon as they slowly made their way down the tunnel.

“Are you encouraging my baby pokemon to resort to violence?” Ash questioned, amusement tinting his voice.

“Yes.”

...

As Leaf's starter pokemon, Venusaur was powerful. He had no disadvantage against the Magnemite, Magnetron or even the Magnezone, though he didn't have the advantage either. Leaf trusted her pokemon to know what to do on his own, to fight off the smaller pokemon, but electric attacks aiming to cause harm would slow any pokemon down, and hers was surrounded by them.

She reached for another pokeball containing a Vespiquen, a recent capture of hers that wasn't very powerful yet but was immensely helpful in tracking down the plants she was looking for. The bug-type was fast, and Leaf's plan was to make her grab Shaymin and get out. Leaf didn't care about who this 'Zero' was or how Newton knew him, it didn't change anything for her.

She never got the chance to throw her pokeball though. Magnemite surrounded her, using their magnets to stick together, constricting her movement and pulling her off the ground. Leaf struggled against them, hearing Dawn to the same beside her, but she couldn't move, not even as her Venusaur finally fell.

“If it isn't the good doctor, Newton Graceland,” Zero said from atop his ridiculous hovering machine. “Long time no see.”

“I'm going to rip his stupid hair out of his head,” Leaf seethed as she struggled and kicked at the pokemon around her. Pain rippled up her foot as she made contact with the metal, and a stream of curses that would have made a pirate blush (Dawn certainly looked horrified).

Newton gracefully ignored her as he yelled, “Save it! Why did you come here!”

“You know why.” Zero flew towards them, and up close, Leaf could see that his eyes were a bright yellow devoid of any real emotion that she could see. “To make this world my own.”

That made her stop struggling and stare at him blankly, while Dawn mumbled a small, “Huh?”

“You're still on that!”

“Still on that?” Leaf asked slowly. “That is the biggest under-reaction to someone trying to take over a world ever!”

“Keep your mouth shut girl,” Zero snarled at her suddenly. “You know nothing about the privilege you have by setting foot in this world.”

“Leaf,” Dawn muttered quietly. “Let him talk.” The older girl looked around, her anger getting the best of her, but there was something on the blue-haired girl's face that made her stop and calm down. She was looking at something over Leaf's shoulder, eyes brimming with fear. The brunette looked around, following her gaze to see a massive, dark cloud coming towards them.

“Oh Mew,” Leaf breathed out because she knew exactly what that was, and they needed to get out of there now. Dawn was right, letting this Zero (what a ridiculous name) talk was the best thing that they could do in order to try and escape. They'd let the men talk and get distracted and figure

out what to do on their own.

“Where were we?” Zero turned his attention to Newton again. “Oh right, your selfishness at keeping this world for yourself!”

“To myself? The Reverse World is vital in that it sustains the real world!”

“I’ve already figured that out. However...” He flew over to a toxic cloud “This place is beautiful, but people destroy it, vile and pollute it.”

“That’s this world’s job!” Newton yelled as the Magnemite flew down towards the cloud, starting to fly around it in a rapid cycling motion that got faster and faster.

“Oh, that’s right, I forgot to tell you,” Zero smirked. “I finished making your invention.”

“No!” Whatever was so horrible about this, they never found out. The flying Magnemite acted as a fan, blowing the toxic cloud until it completely surrounded them.

...

“Get down.”

Ash looked up as Brock hissed at them, a bit surprised to see him squatting behind a large boulder. He motioned for them to come over, and Ash didn’t question him, helping Misty over and into a kneeling position against the rough stone.

“What’s—,” Brock shushed him, and Ash lowered his voice. “Sorry, what’s going on?”

“Take a look.” He motioned to the top of the boulder.

Ash stood up, peaking his above the edge of the massive rock. His heart started beating rapidly when he saw Leaf and Dawn struggling against the grip of several Magnemite. His body tensed, and he was about to launch himself over the boulder, but Brock grabbed him and dragged him back to the ground.

“We have to play his carefully,” Brock told them sternly. “They could electrocute them both on sight.”

“What’s going on?” Misty whispered, trying to keep her voice low as she shifted, leaning against the rock and peaking around the side. “Oh.” It was such a simple statement, but the horror on her face was evident.

“He’s going to poison them too,” Ash whispered urgently, watching as the Magnemite started funneling a massive dark cloud towards Dawn, Leaf, Piplup, Newton and a Venusaur that he assumed belonged to Leaf. The poor thing looked like it had taken a massive beating. He almost ran out again, but Brock held onto the back of his black and yellow vest tightly. “Let me go. We have to help them!” Despite his desperation, he still only spoke in a whisper.

“What are you going to do? Run into a poison cloud and get yourself sick too?” Brock snipped at him. “Something else is going on here so just wait a second. We’re going to think this through. Trust me, I thought of running out there too.”

Ash wanted to argue, but he also knew that Brock was not the type to sit around and just let bad things happen to the people he cared about, or really anyone for that matter.

“Shaymin,” Misty mumbled, drawing the attention of both her friends. She pointed, and they were quick to find Shaymin, who was trapped between two Magnemite and being brought closer to the cloud of poison.

“What are they doing?” Ash wanted to know, but neither of his companions, nor his two pokemon, could answer him.

...

Dawn was never a swimmer, nor was she the type of person to climb the tallest mountains, so holding her breath for such a long period of time was absolutely aggravating. Her throat and lungs burned, and whenever she opened her eyes, those started to water as well.

“Dawn.”

Despite the sting, the blue-haired girl looked up, meeting Shaymin's bright green eyes. The pokemon stared at her with mingling horror and guilt as she struggled with the Magnemite.

“I'm sorry, I never meant for this to happen.” Shaymin told her as she closed her eyes, the flowers on either side of her head starting to glow. “I'm sorry.”

The toxic fumes were sucked into the darkening flowers, and Dawn gasped for breath, hearing Leaf and Newton doing the same beside her. She panted as a high-pitched sound echoed through the air, her head snapping up.

“What a pity Giratina. Because of Dialga you lost your ability to travel back to the real world,” he said in a mocking tone, like someone would say to a small child who was having a hard time understanding something. “Don't worry. I'll help you.” Zero cackled.

“Of course,” Newton groaned as he caught his breath. “Seed Flare. The explosion from this one will be immense.”

“How immense, exactly?” Leaf asked warily, coughing a couple times.

“Giratina's here!” Dawn heard Shaymin cry out in horror, and a small part of her was a bit annoyed. They covered the fact that Giratina didn't want to eat Shaymin a hundred times already, yet it was still fretting over the pokemon.

“Now! Open a hole using Seed Flare! Help Giratina! Allow it to leave, now!” Zero cried out dramatically.

Shaymin struggled with the Magnemite, completely ignoring the white-haired man. She cried out in horror and cringed as Giratina flew through the floating Magnemite and Magnetron, tossing them in all directions. He flew up higher, turning with ease thanks to his ghost-like serpentine body, attacking again.

“Piiikaaachuuu!” Pikachu sprang out of nowhere, flipping through the air and slamming his iron-covered tail into a Magnemite. He spun around, hitting another before they realized what was happening, and Dawn fell to the ground.

“Ow,” she muttered as pain jolted up her spine. She rubbed her lower back, watching as Ria jumped in front of her, hitting another startled Magnemite with an Aura Sphere. The combine effort of the two pokemon meant that Leaf, Newton and their pokemon were soon free.

“Return,” Leaf called out to her beaten Venusaur. She looked over her shoulder. “Took you long

enough, Ketchum.”

“Brock said to wait for the opportune moment.” Ash shrugged as he hopped over a boulder that he had been watching from. “Something about not wanting to get your brains fried.” His bright brown eyes looked up towards Giratina, who lashed out at Magnezone. “He's not happy.”

“State the obvious, please.” Dawn jumped up at Misty's voice, her eyes going wide as the girl slowly walked out of the cavern, Brock hovering very close just in case she fell again. The younger girl hurried over, not bothering to ask if she was okay, because that seemed like a very stupid question to her.

“What does psycho there want Giratina for?” Ash asked Newton, pointing towards Zero, who was just watching his pokemon get thrashed without a worry.

“His name's Zero, and if I'm right, he has a horrible pl—.” Newton was cut off by Shaymin's horrified yet.

In his rampage, Giratina got too close for the small pokemon's comfort. She curled up more and cried out, “Giratina's going to eat me!” Her darkened flowers started to glow, the light spreading across her small body.

The explosion that followed was massive. The light was blindingly bright, more so than anything else Ash had seen in the Reverse World so far (and that was saying something), but the shockwaves were the worst part. Dawn latched onto Piplup and Misty, the two of them flying back first onto Brock and then to the wall of the mountain behind them. Ash caught Ria, his other arm flying out to grab Leaf, who was holding Pikachu. They flew back and he groaned in pain as they skidded across the ground, Newton landing beside them.

The only sound to reach Ash's ears outside of the whipping wind was Zero's eerie, maniacal laughter, followed by Giratina's shriek. Then everything fell silently.

Ash gasped loudly and Leaf actually screamed beside him as they were suddenly jerked up into the air by a powerful vacuum. He looked up, seeing a glowing rip in the sky above them, a rip that Shaymin was already being pulled through. Pikachu squealed as he flipped through the air, and Ash could see Brock trying to keep a grip on both Misty and Dawn as they flipped through the air. Soon, light surrounded them and it was too hard to see anything. Even so, a yell still managed to catch up with him.

“And now, Giratina! Realize your dream and go to the real world!”

It might have been the flipping through the air, but at that moment, Ash had a horrible feeling in his gut that Giratina should not go through the portal. He wished that he was psychic, that he could communicate with the pokemon easily over along distance, but it was impossible.

The next thing he knew, there was a flash of bright light, and everything went black.

...

The air was surprisingly cool when Ash came around again, which surprised him a bit, because the Reverse World was pretty comfortable temperature wise. He wasn't going to question why that was, just why it wasn't right now.

Great, he wasn't even making any sense right now.

He groaned and looked around, startled to see a rather normal place with a normal sky and no



random cliffs that led to a never-ending drop. There were Magnemite and Magnetron floating around, but they seemed completely passive, like they were confused about where were took.

“Home,” Ash mumbled as he pushed himself up. “We're home, right?”

“Yes,” Newton answered him, already standing up, staring around the valley that they were in.

Ash nodded his head, but then the thought of his friends rammed back into the forefront of his mind. He practically flailed as he got up, looking around to make sure that everyone was there. A sigh of relief escaped him when he realized that all of them were coming around one by one.

“This place is really pretty,” Misty mumbled as Ash came over to her side. “Feels better too.”

His brow furrowed. “Are you okay? You sound...” He trailed off, not wanting to invoke her fury by saying that she sounded like an airhead.

“Look at this place,” Leaf whispered as she stood up, twisting around to take in everything from the trees, to the mountains, to the night sky above them. “It's just...wow. And that! That's a lot of ice!”

“It's a glacier,” Brock noted as he took in their strange surroundings. He was just relieved that they were home too.

“Dawn?”

The blue-haired girl looked around as Shaymin inched towards her. The pokemon bowed her head slightly and said, “I'm sorry.”

“For what?” Her voice didn't come out too harsh, because Shaymin had willingly saved them from the poisonous cloud. Not that it absolved her from what she had done earlier.

“Everything, but it'll all get better now.” Shaymin nodded her head optimistically. She looked around at the massive field behind them. “Don't you see, all the answers are here!”

“The answers for what?” Ash asked a little bit bitterly, Pikachu and Ria mimicked his annoyed expression.

“Everything.” Shaymin nodded to the field. “You got me here. This is the Flower Garden.”

*Sky*

## To Heal And Hurt

“We're really in the Flower Garden?” The hope in Misty's voice put Ash on edge, because if Shaymin was lying to them, he was sure he'd finally snap. He glanced at her, watching her eyes dart around eagerly towards different plants as she shifted a bit. He was glad that whatever episode she had in the Reverse World was only a temporary thing. That place was so strange, he really shouldn't have been surprised that a poison that was supposed to be slow-acting in their world seemed to hurt her a lot in that one.

“Yes,” Shaymin confirmed, waddling up to the plants that were there. “See all of these? They're all gracedia flowers. They haven't bloomed yet, but you can still use the roots.” He couldn't see the pokemon anymore, but the shifting plants let him know where Shaymin was. Not that it truly mattered anymore.

Leaf moved before any of them could truly comprehend Shaymin's words. It was strange how much the relief of actually getting to the Flower Garden shocked them so much. Luckily for them, Leaf knew how to stay on task, and her quick motions brought them out of her shock. She tossed two pokeballs into the air, flashes of light revealing her Espeon and a Manectric.

“Help me dig up the roots, but be careful with them,” she urged her two pokemon, kneeling on the ground right beside the plants. The pokemon nodded and went to work. She brought out her tablet, clicking it on and quickly coming to the screen she needed. “Okay, what we need to do is—.”

She was cut off by a loud screech echoing through the air. They all looked around towards the still-open portal that they had all been ignoring, watching as a massive form, shrouded in a strange glow, struggle to get out of the portal. Finally, it was free, it's large serpentine body flying through the air before landing on the ground, six legs growing out of its body before he truly took shape.

Ash could feel the sheer delight radiating off of Giratina as he looked around, free of his prison in the Reverse World. Seeing that he wasn't really doing much but enjoying his freedom, Ash was quick to turn his attention back to the more important task (in his mind) at hand: getting Misty better.

“Up you go,” Ash said, putting his hands under her arms and tugging her off the ground in one quick motion that apparently didn't surprise her, since she just went along with it. She looped one arm over his shoulder, silently letting him know that she still needed some help walking, and he gladly obliged, helping her stumble over to where Leaf was kneeling down. “Is there anything we can do to help?” He acted as a solid object for Misty to hold onto as she sat down beside Leaf, though he let her move on her own rather than trying to push her to the ground or anything. Honestly, she looked so much better compared to when they were in the Reverse World already.

“Yeah,” Leaf nodded her head. She dug through her bag, pulling out a small, metal bowl and handing it to him. She nodded towards the lake and said, “Get some water. Try not to get any other sort of plants or something in it. We're going to boil it, so microscopic things...really tiny things you can't see with your bare eye (She must have seen his confused expression), anyway, those things don't matter. Just get some water that looks clear.” Ash nodded his head, taking the bowl into his hand.

He ran quickly, Ria rushing beside him. “Misty's gonna be better and Giratina's happy. Does that mean all the badness is over?” She tilted her head curiously.

“I...” Ash shook his head. “No, not yet.” Zero was still there and whatever he was up to was going

to come to a head soon, but right now, they were in the eye of the storm and they needed to take advantage of that. “Keep an eye on that portal for me, okay?”

“Okay!” She skipped off, closer to where Newton was watching the portal with a stern expression.

After Ash hurried off, Leaf ordered Brock to find fire wood and set up a small camp fire for them. Not for warmth, but so that they could boil the roots and the water later on. Leaf was checking over the ones her pokemon got, measuring them by their weight on a little tiny scale that she had.

Dawn knelt down beside the two girls, titling her head curiously. “Why do you have all this stuff?”

“I was specifically looking for cures for poisons,” Leaf explained as she nodded her head, happy with what her pokemon found. She frowned a bit before looking at Dawn. “Think Piplup can wash these off?”

“Sure. Piplup, use a light water gun on those, alright?” Dawn motioned towards the roots, and her small pokemon complied, working to clean the dark soil off of them.

“Anyway,” Leaf continued as she pulled a small, stone bowl and what looked like a club-shaped object, “the reason I have all this stuff is because I was looking for cures for the pokedex. The herbs trainers can use and how to prepare them. Often times the plants that can help you are found in the same area as the pokemon and plants that can hurt you. So I had all this stuff in case I got stun.” Quickly shifting gears, she checked over the cleaned roots and nodded, wringing them out a bit and putting them in the bowl before handing it out to Dawn. “Can you mash this up for me?”

“Sure,” she nodded and took the bowl. “You know, I’ve never used a mortar and pestle before.” She giggled at Leaf and Misty’s surprised expressions. “There’s an old woman in Twinleaf Town who babysat me from time to time. She made herbs and things by hand and sometimes I would help her. Nice old lady.”

Ash came back over to them, only spilling a little bit of water in his dash back over. He knelt handed Leaf the water, glancing from one girl to the next. “Is there anything?” He just wanted to help in any way that he could.

Brock came back just behind him, setting the dry sticks and wood that he found to the ground. “Chimchar would be a help right now.”

His small, fire-type was quick to set the sticks on fire before scampering off to where Pikachu and Ria were standing watch, staring up at Giratina with awe.

“We’re good,” Leaf assured Ash, knowing what he was going to ask if there was something else he could do. She dug through her bag again, frowning as she started looking at the labels she had on each pack.

Ash was going to ask another question, but before he could, a thick, red beam of light shot out of the fog, slamming into Giratina. The pokemon cried in surprise and pain, struggling against the light as a strange metal contraption loomed out of the thick mist.

Ash jumped to his feet, able to do nothing but watch as this strange, red-metal thing came off of the ship, glow red light twisting around it almost like the bars of a cage. It opened up, following the red beam of light to Giratina and surrounding it. The pokemon cried out, trying to twist away as the contraption, that was far worse than anything Ash had ever seen Team Rocket make, flighted into the air. He hadn’t even noticed Zero leave from the Reverse World, but the man abandoned his stupid hover-segway (what was it really?), running over to the machine that now held Giratina

captive, jumping up onto it before it got too high in the air.

“Giratina!” Zero called out. “I have been waiting such a long time for you to come here!” The cage made of metal and lasers was pulled back to the main part of the flying ship, and all they could do was watch in horror.

Ash ran, rushing as close to the water as he could and stopping alongside Newton and Brock.

“What is that thing? What's he doing to Giratina?”

“I don't...”

Whatever was happening as the ship flew higher into the sky, it was horrible. Giratina's cries of pain in the night sky set everyone on edge, the bright red glow lighting up the entire valley eerily.

“I created that,” Newton said slowly, regret tinting his voice. “I thought all of the blueprints were destroyed though.”

“What does it do?” Brock asked him, though he sounded like he didn't really want to know.

“It absorbs all of Giratina's powers.”

“What?” Ash positively exploded, his hands clenching into fists. Pikachu hopping onto his shoulder, muttering quietly to get him to calm down. “Why would you do that?”

“So I could enter and leave the Reverse World at will.” Newton glanced at him over his shoulder, regret and shame mingling on his face. “I stopped as soon as I realized that Giratina would be sacrificed.”

“Sacrificed...” If he wasn't wearing gloves, Ash was sure that his nails would have been digging into the palm of his hand. His whole body was shaking, and he was beyond furious. “Are you kidding me? Just so you could hop from one world to the next that you were never even supposed to go to? What did you think would happen to it if Giratina died?” He threw his arms up, and Ash honestly felt like he was going to cry from frustration, though that just made him more frustrated because he sure as hell wasn't going to cry. “People like you who just can't leave them alone are the reason it's so hard to keep them safe!”

“Ash!” Brock scolded him, reaching out to squeeze his shoulder. “Calm down.”

“No, Brock. You know exactly what I mean.” Ash swung back around to look at Newton. “How long do we have to get Giratina out of there?”

“Not long. If it's built to my specifications, it'll work fast.”

Ash looked up and he had no idea how they were going to get up there to save Giratina. He was just so frustrated and his stress finally reached it's apex, and he wanted someone to blame, someone to yell at. He could feel the palms of his hands tingling, and didn't even have to look to know that his aura was threatening to lash out. If they were at a place like the Tree of Beginning, where aura flowed so free and naturally everywhere, he probably wouldn't have been able to control himself by that point of time.

Brock grabbed his arms and pushed him back a bit. “Go with Misty. We'll figure out what to do. Just go over there and check on her and the others and cool down for just two minutes before you do something that you'll regret.” Ash was going to argue with him, but Brock never gave him the chance. “Well think of something. Just go.”

Finally, Ash relented, taking a deep breath and storming back over towards where the three girls had been silently watching the altercation, Dawn still crushing the roots.

“That was something,” Leaf commented as she tapped a syringe filled with red liquid. “The glowing hands? Neat trick.”

He ignored that, kneeling beside her and staring curiously. “What's that?”

“Field kid to test for poison levels in the blood,” Misty said, rubbing her arm in the spot Leaf pricked to get the blood sample. “I hate needles.” This was something that Ash did know, remembering how she put up a fuss about getting certain shots before they went to the Orange Islands, since there was such a variety of different habitats and not always a lot

“You had that this whole time and didn't use it?” Ash cocked an eyebrow at his childhood friend, trying to focus on this and not whatever Brock and Newton were talking about.

“Well, after we realized she was poisoned, we were chased through a town, onto a train, onto a water pokemon, into another world and then here,” Leaf spoke dryly while motioning to the field around them. “I didn't really have the chance. At least this way we'll be able to monitor her getting better.”

“What's going on?” Dawn asked as she finished crushing the roots. She looked at the instructions Leaf gave her, carefully making sure everything got into the water bowl that was hovering over the fire. It took Ash a moment to realize that Espeon must have been holding it up with her psychic powers. Dawn took the ladle that was there and started stirring it. “What is that thing and what's Zero doing to Giratina?”

The whole situation was so surreal, because there was a legendary pokemon dying just above them while they all sat in a valley, lit up with the red lights from Giratina's prison, acting like it wasn't a big thing. Ash almost wanted to laugh.

“It's going to kill him,” Ash said grimly, looking at the sky. “But we have no way to get up there.” How many times had he made a mental note to always keep Charizard with him in case of situations like this? Or maybe he should check in on Pidgeot again, or get another pokemon that he could fly on.

Misty frowned at him and shook her head. “So you're giving up?”

Ash was taken back by just how stern she sounded, despite the slight tremor in her voice. “No, I just—.”

“I agree with her, that's what it sounds like,” Leaf added as she finished with the test, setting it back into the kit after making sure that the needle was properly capped and sealed in a hazardous waste bag. “And that doesn't sound like you at all.”

“Well I—.”

“No.” Leaf held up her hand. “I'll admit, I have no idea what's been going on with you these last couple years, league battles aside, but I've known you longer than anyone else here, and I'm going to call bs on this attitude you've had going. You've never been the type to give up, to let things really get to you. You've always been so ridiculously optimistic about everything, but you're just not right now.” She pointed at him. “Worry and stress hits everyone, but my point still stands.”

“Done,” Dawn said after looking at the instructions. She took one of the cups Leaf brought out earlier, pouring the entire mixture in and then handing it to Misty. “Careful, it's hot. Just think of it

as a green tea.”

Misty reached out, taking it from her and blowing on it for a moment before sipping. Her face twisted into one of disgust as she almost gagged, but kept taking small sips of the hot mixture.

“That's not fair, Leaf,” Ash scowled at her, completely ignoring the exchange between the other two girls. “You have no idea what's going on!”

“Then tell me!”

“Didn't you guess? About what Shaymin said earlier? I have to help the legendary pokemon. Like, I actually have to. I don't have a choice. It's my job to make sure the legendary pokemon don't destroy the world and themselves!”

All three girls were silent, Misty drinking her horrible brew, Dawn staring with wide eyes, and Leaf looking like she'd known all along. Maybe she had.

“Maybe you're supposed to help them, but not having a choice is a load of Tauros-crap and you know it! Since when have you ever done something you honestly haven't wanted to do? You've always been just as stubborn as you were optimistic. Seriously, do you remember that time at Professor Oak's Pokemon Camp? You were helping some girl that got hurt, and Gary was tormenting her a bit so you stood up for her again. You didn't care if he tried to tease you about having a girlfriend, because you wanted to help her and that's what you were going to do. That's just a small example, I could give you a hundred more. If you didn't want to do even your chores, you somehow managed to pawn them off onto me when your mom was babysitting.” She glared at him and took a deep breath after her rant. “So if your mom couldn't make you do something you didn't want to, what's a pokemon you don't know going to do?” She shook her head. “I don't believe that for a second that you don't have a choice.”

“Leaf...” He trailed off.

“So are you just going to sit here, or are you going to do something about this? It's up to you.”

He looked at Leaf, then at Misty, Dawn, Pikachu, Piplup and Ria, all of whom were staring back at him curiously.

Ash looked up at Giratina and slowly got to his feet. He pressed his lips together, brow furrowing as he looked around. “Pikachu, Ria, come on.” He ran towards Newton again, his pokemon bounding beside him.

Dawn watched him go, an expression so similar to his that it was almost uncanny passing across her face as she stood up. “Will you be good without me?”

“Yeah,” Leaf nodded her head.

“Dawn...” Misty reached a hand out towards her, worry evident in her expression.

“You just focus on getting better. No need to worry” Dawn picked up Piplup and ran after him, her hair whipping behind her.

Ash reached Newton just as he got on Zero's floating, metal thing (yeah, he was still going to call it a hover-segway, it sounded better than floating metal thing). “What are you doing?”

“You're right for your anger. This whole thing is my fault.” He finished programming the machine and stared up at Ash determinedly. “I need to make sure Giratina's safe.”

“Well you're not going alone.” Ash held his arms out, letting Pikachu and Ria climb up on either side, holding onto his shoulders tightly as he ran up beside Newton.

“I'm coming too,” Dawn insisted as she got on, Piplup jumping on the ground beside Newton's Aron. “You can't stop me.”

Ash glared at her briefly, and she just glared back, daring him to say that she couldn't help. He had no idea why the younger girl wanted to come, and the protective side of him wanted to tell her to go back with the others, but at the same time, he couldn't do it. He wouldn't have turned away from a challenge when he was younger, so what right did he have to kick her off.

“You guys are slow!” Shaymin said, appearing above them in her Sky Form.

“Huh, but...it's night,” Brock commented. It was true, the sky was still dark, stars glittering above them. The place they were in would have been beautiful and tranquil, if it wasn't doused in violent, red light.

“Yeah and other Shaymin couldn't, but this is my Flower Garden,” Shaymin held her head up. “We play by my rules here!” She took off into the sky. “And I'm going ahead!”

“Alright.” A responsible adult who had been in the real world in the past couple of years probably would have said no to a teenager and a young girl coming with him, but Newton was a bit out of touch with other people and didn't question their decisions at all. He quickly took off into the air, forcing Ash and Dawn to grab whatever they could to stay up. “I hope you're not afraid of heights.”

“Just get to Giratina!” Ash called out to him, holding on as best as he could.

“Pi pikachu!”

Shaymin flew ahead of them, faltering only briefly when she saw Zero's Magnemite and Magnetron fly at them. Ash himself was seriously getting sick of seeing those pokemon pop up everywhere. He was the type to embrace almost any type of pokemon, not caring about their type or appearance, but Magnemite and its evolutions was really getting high on the list of pokemon he didn't want to catch, right up there with Tentacool, Spearow, Aerodactyl and now Shaymin.

Ash wasn't afraid of heights by any means, but flipping around and jerking roughly to avoid the pokemon attacking them was a bit jarring. He looked behind Newton's back towards Dawn, relieved to see that she was holding on well enough as they twisted and turned in every direction to avoid the pokemon and the streaks of lightning jolting by them. Magnezone flew by them, disorientated from a powerful Energy Ball that Shaymin created.

They flew higher up into the air, swerving around the strange metal pillars of the flying contraption (seriously, did all bad guys have to have some really strange flying thing? Was that required?) and flying up above it.

“Try to disrupt the beams with long-range attacks,” Newton told them as he concentrated on flying.

“Lets give it a shot,” Ash said to Dawn. “Pikachu, use Thunder Bolt!”

“Piplup, use Bubble Beam!”

Water and electricity surged together, combining into a particularly potent attack that slammed into the crackling red lights that imprisoned Giratina. Steam rose into the air, but the cage was completely in tact.

"It's do a thing!" Ash yelled angrily. Giratina's distress rose up like an uncomfortable, unwanted beacon, and he had absolutely no idea how to help him.

"They bounced right off." Dawn added, for the benefit of Newton rather than Ash.

The man frowned, avoiding the attacks of several Magnemite as he said, "Then I'll have to go in and stop him myself."

"You can do that?" Dawn called to him, but didn't get an answer as they flipped and twisted in the air. It was hard to hear anything as the wind whipped by their ears, but their close proximity made it a little easier. That didn't help them as they swerved around Magnezone. Newton jerked the 'hover-segway' harshly to avoid the electric currents flying at them, but Ash couldn't breathe a sight of relief.

Instead, his heart leapt up to his chest as Dawn jerked roughly, her fingers slipping from where she was holding onto both Newton and their mode of transportation. She didn't scream, she let out a sharp gasp of surprise as her arms windmilled and she fell backwards.

Ash jerked around, flailing out to grab a hold of her. His fingers just managed to wrap around her wrists, but he was too late to pull her back to safety. Her added weight and momentum were enough to jerk him back Pikachu and Ria still clutching his collar to keep themselves attached to him, even as they all plummeted to the ground.

...

"That stuff was horrible," Misty said to Brock, nodded to the empty cup that once held the tea made of gracedia roots. The young man was only coming to join them now, haven been watching the battle in the air with horrified anticipation. Misty understood that though, she was on edge watching them all flip and fly around.

"It'll make you better," Brock reminded her, kneeling down on the ground and putting his hand to her forehead. "Huh." He leaned away a bit, looking at her curiously. "You already feel cooler. How...?" He looked towards Leaf.

"This stuff is potent, it starts working pretty quickly," Leaf motioned to some of the root she was storing in a clear baggie. "It's like...the Full Restore of natural cures."

Misty understood that much. Full Restores were expensive, but they worked almost instantly on a pokemon that wasn't injured to the point of needing surgery. It was what the Pokmon Centers generally used to heal pokemon, a free service to all trainers, but actually owning a small spray bottle of that could put a dent in someone's pocket. Many found the price worth it though.

"Good," she said, pushing herself to her knees from a sitting position. She pushed her bright orange bangs out of her eyes and looked at the two fiercely. "So lets stop worrying about me and find a way to help Giratina."

"Woah there, let me check first to make sure it's really working," Leaf said, pulling a second syringe, bandaid and the kit to hold it so she could properly dispose of it later.

"Who taught you to do that?" Brock asked, raising an eyebrow as he watched the two girls. Misty was looking away, clearly unhappy but not trying to argue. "Professor Oak?"

"Delia Ketchum," Leaf explained as she focused on drawing the blood. Her hands didn't waver in the least as she finished and went to work with the testing kit. "You see, Pallet's actually pretty close to the ocean, but you guys must know that." They both nodded their heads. "When we were



younger, Ash's allergy to Tentacool poison was actually much worse than it is now. He actually had an EpiPen at the time, just in case. He knew how to use it but was a bit of a wimp so his mother taught Gary and I what to do, just in case. I mean, that's easier than this, that's just jabbing him in the leg, but she taught me how to be more careful too." She smiled as she looked at the results. "How about that, you're already getting better."

"Good," Misty repeated with a nod. "Delia's a pretty awesome person, isn't she? She's practically like my mother."

"Well, she was more 'motherly' to me than my mom, so yeah, I get what you mean." Now Misty kind of regretted the fact that she had been too sick to really get to know this girl during their adventure. She didn't even know her and still, she stepped up to help and was ultimately the one that ended up saving her, even after Misty was suspicious and a tiny bit withdrawn from her at first.

Brock made a sound and was about to comment when a loud bang and a yell reached their ears. The three of them looked up towards the sky, watching in horror as a figure started plummeting to the ground and another one reached for it.

...

Ash cried out in pain as he slammed into one of the iron bars that made up the strange structure of Zero's flying machine. He managed to wrap his arm and leg around the bar to keep himself attached, but Dawn's hand slid through his fingers and instantly forgot about his own pain. Ash scrambled to grab her again, but Dawn fell too quickly.

She screamed as she slammed into one of the bars below him, sliding down a bit but managing to get her wits about her, twisting around and grabbing onto the beam before she could fall.

Ash sighed in relief, looking up at Pikachu and Ria who managed to actually land on the metal beam rather gracefully, though they were having a hard time keeping Piplup up. They got him over to more solid part of the ship though.

A loud bang distracted Ash, and he looked up just in time to see Shaymin falling to the ground. He jerked and gasped, like he could reach out and help, but there was no need, since Newton swept in and caught the small pokemon, flying around to avoid the Magnemite. Oddly enough, the pokemon and their evolutions were completely ignoring Ash and Dawn now.

Ash kind of hated the fact that his knee-jerk reaction was instantly to help Shaymin when she was in danger, despite everything that she had done to Misty. He shook his head, not wanting to think about that now. There was a pokemon that he desperately did want to assist.

Precariously, Ash got up and started moving across the metal beams. Just below him, he could see Dawn doing the same, holding her arms out to balance herself. It was slow going, but they managed to regroup with their pokemon, both sighing with relief over the fact that they didn't fall to their deaths.

"What now?" Dawn asked him, her hair flying into her worried, frightened eyes. Ash had to hand it to her though, she was trying so hard to keep a brave face.

"We need to get to Giratina," Ash said, twisting around to look towards the front of the ship where the legendary pokemon was being held. He could feel the pokemon's agony, and would do anything he could to stop it. They needed to get across the entire ship though, and it wouldn't be easy. He relayed that last thought to her.

Dawn stared at him silently before her face scrunched into such a determined expression that it was almost like watching the videos of his younger self participating in a league. “You're the Chosen One and we've got a legendary to save!”

He stared and nodded his head, a strange smile, a mix of relief, happiness and determination, spread across his face. “Let's go then.”

*Sky*

## Never Alone

Ash despised watching action movies with Brock; he really did. The young man would often point out what was unrealistic in a movie, and honestly, if Ash was watching it, he didn't care if it was realistic or not, he was just there for the action. A random bench explodes with nothing even remotely explosive around it? That was fine with him.

Precariously dangling on a strange, metal flying ship hundreds of meters off of the ground brought one of Brock's comments to the forefront of his mind, and he was actually glad for once. Brock often scoffed at the hero trying to walk across small logs, branches or beams. He said that the only reason they did it was because it looked better on camera, but what they should have done is crawled or laid on their bellies and pulled themselves across. There'd be a much smaller chance of them falling.

That was why, when Dawn tried to get up to walk across the metal beams, Ash hauled her back down. Add on to the fact that the ship was *moving* fairly rapidly, they were almost guaranteed to fall if they tried to walk across it.

She looked at him questioningly, but Ash couldn't hear her over the crackling of lightning, the bangs of explosions and the whistling of the wind around them. Instead, he showed her what he wanted to do. He felt silly, basically laying down and dragging himself with his arms. It was ridiculous and slow, but it was going to keep him alive for a little while longer. To her credit, Dawn caught on quickly and started mimicking his movements. Pikachu and Piplup did the same, but Ash put Ria back in her pokeball before she could protest. She didn't seem to understand exactly what they were doing, and there was really no time to explain.

Giratina's cries of pain got louder, and Ash used that as motivation to move faster. It was hard to keep a grip on the smooth surface, but he'd always been incredibly good at climbing and this wasn't going to be any different.

His muscles strained as he jerked himself across the metal beams, trying to figure out exactly which route to take to get to Giratina without falling. Dawn ended up right beside him, and she was close enough so that he could hear her strain as she tried to climb.

"Come on," Ash urged her. "We can do it!"

Dawn nodded her head and gritted her teeth, reaching forward to pull herself up farther. He was right, they could do this. No, it was more than that, they *had* to do this.

As reached the side of the ship first, and was glad to see the very convenient grooves in the side to hold onto. He used them to yank himself up, wobbling a little bit and reminding himself to not look down because as much as Ash didn't mind heights, they were on the ship of a raging psychopath.

He reached down, holding out his hand for Dawn. She gladly grabbed it and he helped yank her up, her other hand grasping onto the grooves in the ship so tightly that it turned her knuckles white. Still, she looked up, the wind whipping her long, blue hair into her eyes, and nodded her head, silently telling him that she was okay.

Ash nodded in return and looked towards the front of the ship, eyebrows furrowing as his face set in determination. He started walking carefully, holding onto the ship with one hand and holding on to Dawn with the other. He remembered back to the Space-Time Towers in Alamos Town, and how Ria taught him to use aura to make himself jump faster and farther because aura was in

absolutely everything living, even down to the smallest blade of grass. There wasn't really much to grasp onto, so Ash focused on his own aura, imagining a shield around them. He leaned back a little bit, slightly surprised to feel it meet something solid, but when he looked back there was nothing there.

"Dawn!" he yelled, and she looked at him curiously. He reached the hand that he was holding onto back, and the look on her face when it collided with the shield he created was actually hilarious.

"What?" Dawn looked so perplexed.

"Aura." That was the only explanation that he gave as he continued forward. She gripped onto him tighter as they continued to make their way around the metal ship. Knowing that they could fall off gave Ash the confidence to go faster, confidence that seemed to leak to Dawn.

She let go of his arm, holding onto the ship instead. Finally reaching the edge where there was an actual steel floor that led to a door one way and a metal plank with railings to keep them from falling going the other, Ash breathed a sigh of relief. Once Dawn was safely behind him, he willed his barrier to vanish, feeling a bit of pressure fade away as it did. Almost immediately, Ria's pokeball began to jiggle and she popped out, shaking off her fur and glaring at Ash pointedly.

Ash didn't care about that glare right now. His eyes were focused on the end of the metal plank, red lights bathing his complexion as he stared at the lights that imprisoned Giratina.

"I'll get you out," Ash muttered. "I swear, I'll get you out of this somehow."

He had to, because maybe nobody else could feel it, but he certainly could: Giratina was dying.

...

It was so strange. The sounds of battle echoed through the skies, but everything below was so calm. Misty decided that she would have loved this place with its perfectly clear lake, but she couldn't enjoy it, not with flashing of lightning and the shockwaves of violent explosions coming from above.

She heard Brock protest as she pushed herself up first to her knees and then all the way up. She wobbled a little bit, still a bit woozy, but someone grabbed onto her to keep her upright. She looked over at Leaf, and for the first time realized that the girl was shorter than her, and her dusty brown hair was really long, all the way down to her waist. They were just small things that she hadn't realized before then, haven been too distracted by being sick and in pain.

"You should lay down," Brock told her, hovering by herself and looking fretful, like an overprotective mother Blaziken. "I know you'll be fine, but you're not better yet." He winced as there was another explosion right above their heads.

"Yeah, well tell them that." Misty jerked her thumb up to the air above them. "You expect me to lay around while Dawn and my idiot boyfriend, who is very prone to jumping off high places, I might add, are running around on that death-cage-machine?" She could very clearly see Ash and Dawn trying to scale along the side of it, and though she had no idea how they got there, she honestly wasn't sure if that was worse or better than being with Newton, who was still zigzagging and flipping all over the place in the sky.

Brock looked up and frowned. "Maybe we can use long range attacks. None of my pokemon are going to be helpful with that." Not to mention neither Sudowoodo nor Craogunk would be effective against the opponent's steel typing.

"Vensaur's out, but I have a few that can help," Leaf said with a nod, reaching to her bag to grab several pokeballs. Espeon and Manectric were already out, and her other pokeballs released a Vespiquen, a Loudred and a Beldum. "Alright guys, you see those Magnemite, Magnetron and Magnezone? Take 'em out. Try to avoid the man flying around up there and my friends on that ship, got it?" She pointed up to where Ash and Dawn were.

They nodded, Vespiquen and Beldum flying up into the air while the others started to attack from the ground.

Misty got her own pokeballs, tossing all of them into the air except for Azurill's pokeball. Corsola, Politoad and Spheal appeared along the shore while Lumineon and Gyarados materialized in the lake.

"Don't hit Ash and Dawn! Or that guy up there. If you happen to hit the grass-type, I won't cry," Misty instructed her pokemon.

"Misty," Brock scolded her.

"What? I won't."

Brock shook his head and looked back at the sky, watching as the pokemon were thrown around in every different direction by water, ice, psychic powers and so much more.

Misty's sea-green eyes turned towards the ship, and she leaned a little bit onto Leaf because she still wasn't entirely okay but she really didn't want Brock to see it and fuss over her.

"Did Ash ever tell you about the time he fell off a cliff?" Leaf asked suddenly.

"He *what*?" Misty asked, her voice going shrill with shock and a bit of anger.

"Well, it wasn't a *huge* cliff but we were seven and it seemed huge. See, he used to play baseball, he was a pitcher." Misty raised an eyebrow at that because he had never mentioned that. She knew that he used to *watch* baseball because he was a Starmies fan (as he should be, of course) but not that he played it. How he was able to throw and catch his pokeballs so easily suddenly made sense though. "Well," Leaf continued, "one time the boys were playing for fun and Ash ended up hitting the ball too far. It was by the beach cliffs. You know which ones I'm talking about—."

"I thought you said they weren't high!" Misty did know those cliffs, and the thought of a small child falling down that was startling.

"I meant it wasn't like a mountain-high cliff or something. So he hit the ball and the others made him get it because, well he was bullied by pretty much everyone except me and Gary, though this was the time Gary was starting to do it more. The was balancing just on a little ledge, and he got it pretty easily, but then he ended up slipping and falling. I was reading in the same spot they were playing so I went with him. I tried to catch him, so did Gary, but he just fell."

"Why are you telling me this?" Misty stared at Leaf with uncertain eyes. The girl peered up from under her white hat and smile easily.

"Don't you see? He was fine. We didn't see what, but *something* saved him. He said so himself that something caught him. We just assumed it was a pokemon that hurried away. I really do think it was, but now..." Her narrow, dusty-brown eyes turned towards the caged Giratina. "Now I don't think it was a normal pokemon. I think it was something else. Something more like that." She looked at Misty again. "Ash is different. I always knew that and he was pretty clear why that is. Something saved him then, and you know, I'm willing to bet that, if he fell, something would have

him now too."

Misty suddenly understood what Leaf was doing. She stared for a moment before smiling and nodding her head. "He'll be fine, they both will."

"Exactly," Leaf agreed.

...

**"Do you feel that?"** Ria's voice seemed to echo around Ash. He didn't need to look down at his pokemon to understand what she was talking about. He could feel the energy around Giratina. It felt alive in almost the worst way – like a parasite that wasn't even harming something for its own survival, but simply because it could. The energy wasn't nearly as strong or as *wrong* as the mirage pokemon that they came across before, but it still wasn't right.

"Pikachu, try again from up close." Might as well eliminate the easy things first. Pikachu powered up, sparks flying from his cheeks before a powerful blast of electricity slammed into the cage. The energy didn't waver at all.

"Buneary!" Dawn tossed her pokeball up, and the normal-type came out. "Try freezing the beams with your Ice Beam!"

"Bun!" She nodded her head and sent a blue beam of light that even made Ash feel cold at the prison. It didn't do anything, but luckily it didn't soar right through and hit Giratina.

"Rio ri lu!" Ria jumped up, generating an Aura Sphere that was barely the size of Ash's hand just above hers. Though she wasn't incredibly powerful yet, he knew that her Aura Spheres were special. He watched it soar through the air as she through it, and what happened next surprised him. The cage actually faltered for a minute, but it was short-lived, coming alive again almost instantly.

"Did you see that?" Dawn asked him, her voice muffled by the hand that was over her lips with surprise. "It actually did something. Was that Aura too?"

"Yeah." Ash looked behind him when he heard a sudden clunk and saw Newton landing on the roof above the door. He quickly jumped down so that he was on the same platform as them. "Newton?"

"I can get in this way to shut that thing off!" he yelled back.

"What can we do to help?" Dawn called back to him, steadying herself on the platform as the ship continued to move.

"Take care of the Magnemite! Sheldon, lets go! Flash Cannon!" There was a bright flash of light and the door was completely blown away.

"I'll help with the Magnemite too!" Shaymin called out, shaking off the attack that struck her and flying back into the fray, though she just barely managed to avoid a powerful Flamethrower from below. "Hey, watch it!"

Ash looked over, laughing when he saw the pokemon attacking from below. He nodded his head and called out his other pokemon except for Staravia. He wouldn't do much good against the Magnemite, unfortunately. "Keep attacking them! I'm going to try and help Giratina! Ria, stay with me!" He looked back towards Dawn. "Do you got this?" It wasn't just keeping the Magnemite away, he was also asking her to watch his pokemon. He knew that Newton was going to try and

shut the system off, but he wasn't sure how much time Giratina had left. He felt so *weak*.

Dawn stared at him, her hair whipping into her face before her expression screwed up into a determined one. "No need to worry!"

Ash nodded at her and turned to face Giratina, looking at his pokemon quickly. "Listen to Dawn, okay guys? That includes you, Pikachu."

"Pi!" Pikachu jumped down and talked to the other pokemon for a moment before they all scattered into strategic spots where the attacks from below just couldn't reach.

"***What about me?***" Ria asked him, a bit of a whine to her voice.

"I need you here to help me." Ash held his hands close to his chest, concentrating and creating his own Aura Sphere. "We have to try."

She nodded her head and jumped up onto the metal railing, doing the same and creating her own Aura Sphere, she didn't throw it though, keeping her eyes on her trainer. Ash concentrated on what he wanted to happen, not necessarily picturing it in his mind or thinking a lot on it, but feeling and knowing what he wanted to do. What he needed to do. Then he pushed. The sphere shot forward, slamming into the red energy surrounding Giratina and spreading out. Ash kept his hands out, concentrating and trying to get the aura to spread across everything. All Giratina needed was a second to get out. "Ria."

"Ri rio!" She copied him in motion and intent, getting the same result as him though slightly weaker. Ash could feel a bit of the burden coming off of him, but his hands were already starting to shake. There was no way he could keep this up for a long period of time.

Giratina moved and made a slight cooing noise. Ash could feel the pokemon reaching out a bit. He couldn't understand what he wanted, but Ash could feel something pretty astounding. Giratina's energy wasn't leaving nearly as quickly anymore.

"Good enough," he muttered through gritted teeth. If he could keep Giratina alive long enough for Newton to stop the machine, that was all he needed to do. "Come on Newton, hurry up."

His fingers were going numb, his limbs beginning to cramp uncomfortably. He had to close his eyes from the strain, fighting as hard as he could. He heard Dawn gasp behind him, though he dared not open his eyes and break his focus.

Then the whole ship jerked violently. Ash's concentration broke and he stumbled forward, slamming into the railing. Ria herself toppled over it, but easily flipped herself down onto the platform instead of pitching down to the ground. The loud engines began to quiet, and the energy surrounding Giratina started to slowly dissipate.

"He did it," Ash mumbled, realizing what was going on. A laugh of relief burst from him and he leaned more against the railing. "Oh thank Mew. He did it." Ash reached forward, passing his hand through the last bit of the energy that was left and not feeling anything.

"Dawn!" He yelled at her, twisting around and recalling his pokemon. "Come here! You too, Pikachu!" He reached down, picking up Ria, who just leaned against him, exhausted. "You did good but for now, go back in here, okay?" He held her pokeball up, and she just nodded, pressing the button herself. At least he didn't have two pokemon who were utterly opposed to pokeballs. Speaking of which, Pikachu jumped onto his shoulder, cooing in worry.

"I'll be okay." He reached up, petting Pikachu's fur. He honestly felt like he wanted to go to sleep

for a while, and all the bruises and cuts on him were pulsing with a dull pain, but it would have been far worse. Ash looked over his shoulder as Dawn came up behind him and said, "Come on, we're going to check on Giratina."

"What, like, climb on him?" Dawn asked, sounding completely scandalized by the idea. "Ash! He's a legendary pokemon! You don't just...climb on their backs!"

He stared at her blankly before shrugging and climbing over the railing. Giratina's back was right below them, so he left himself drop. If the legendary pokemon cared that he was there, he didn't make a sound. He looked back at Dawn, motioning for her to follow.

She climbed over the railing, holding onto it with one arm and Piplup with the other before taking a deep breath and letting herself drop. Ash grabbed her arms when she landed in front of him and steadied her, then he turned and began to walk up towards Giratina's head.

"It'll be okay," Ash assured the pokemon once he got up to his head. "You'll see."

"Um, I'm sorry I attacked you before," Dawn squeaked out. Ash stared at her blankly and she puffed her cheeks in anger. "What? I don't know what else I'm supposed to say to a freaking legendary pokemon that rules over its own world!"

Ash was going to reply to that when a loud crackle echoed from in front of them. He looked forward, watching the device around Giratina break apart, the negative energy completely disappearing and the dark metal falling down to the earth and lake below.

They both yelled with surprise as Giratina fell, slamming into another part that kept them all from falling entirely. The pokemon groaned in pain, but Ash was too distracted by the fact that they were suddenly losing altitude. Without the red light, the moon was the only thing lighting the world around them and it was too hard to see exactly where they were falling.

"Oh no," Ash mumbled, grabbing onto Giratina with one arm and holding the other out. "Come here, now." There was no arguing with the stern tone of voice, and Dawn quickly moved to where he was. "Hold onto Pikachu and Piplup, okay? I'll hold onto you and Giratina to keep us both from falling!"

"What? Why?" She got her answer a moment later the last of the engines gave out and the whole ship began plummeting. She screamed and grabbed Pikachu, curling herself around the two pokemon and as close to him as she could. Ash kept one arm around her and the other held to Giratina as tightly as he could.

He heard Newton yell their names and looked up to see him on the hover segway, Shaymin flying along side him. He didn't get the chance to say anything as the ship jerked roughly. Giratina cried out, falling backwards and slamming into something else. Dawn screamed and Ash tried concentrating on a barrier again because he didn't know how well he could hold them up. He yelled loudly as Giratina flipped over and they all plummeted down towards the water below. Ash honestly felt like he left his stomach back up on the ship.

Maybe it was because they were on his back, but Giratina tried to use his frayed wings to slow their freefall. It didn't matter though, they ended up slamming into the water and sinking down.

"Take a breath!" Ash managed to yell to Dawn and the pokemon just before they slammed into the water. He squeezed his eyes shut, hesitantly letting go of Giratina and letting the pokemon sink. Then, a second large body started pushing them up towards the surface. Ash's eyes snapped open, and he almost let out his breath in relief when he saw Gyarados. They broke the surface of the



water, and Dawn coughed violently beside him.

"You okay?" he asked her, letting go so she could move.

Dawn groaned and nodded her head, letting go of Pikachu and Piplup. She pushed herself up a bit and looked around, confused. "Wha...Gyarados?"

"He saved us," Ash said as the pokemon swiftly made his way towards the shore. Ash wasn't really paying attention to anything else as they finally reached land, jumping down and making sure that the young girl was safely on the ground first before he sighed loudly.

They both looked around, watching the ship rip apart parts of the valley walls, the forest, and the Flower Garden before it crashed into the ground completely, dust flying up into the air as everything went silent in the midnight darkness.

"Ash! Dawn!"

His head snapped up and Ash laughed in relief as he saw all three of his friends running towards him. Not only was he relieved that they were all okay, but he was extremely glad to see Misty moving around so much. He took a few stumbling steps towards them, smiling broadly as he looked from Brock to Leaf and then to the redhead. "You're okay."

"Of course I am, you idiot. You almost died again though." She scowled at him fiercely, but her eyes were watering a little bit and her voice was a bit hoarse, like she had screeched loudly or something like that. Her eyes were so tired, her hair was half way out of her ponytail, and she still looked a little bit pale, but she was alive and she'd be okay. That was what mattered. After all, Ash was sure that he looked like a dripping wet, overly used punching bag so what did that matter?

Misty just shook her head and closed the distance between them, throwing her arms over his shoulders and hugging him tightly, burying her head at the side of his neck. "Idiot." She inhaled deeply as she hugged him, not caring that she was getting soaked along with him.

He stood there for a moment, arms at his side awkwardly before he hugged her tightly, leaning his forehead onto her shoulder. "You're okay."

"You said that already." Her voice was muffled by his hood, but she didn't step away from him. Ash didn't care though. He just shook his head slightly, wet hair brushing against her bare shoulder. If she felt the couple tears of relief that escaped his watering eyes, she didn't point it out.

...

Leaf watched the two of them with amused eyes before shaking her head and looking at Dawn. "You okay there, kid?"

"I'm fine." Her voice was a bit shaky, and she was completely soaked, but she was, all things considered, fine.

"What were you thinking?" Brock scolded her lightly. "Going up there with them? Ash would have been fine." The tone of his voice made it obvious that he probably would have wanted to keep Ash on the ground too, but there was very little chance in stopping him from going.

Dawn's face faltered, her eyes flickering over to Ash and Misty before she stared at the ground. "It's just..."

"Just what?"

She turned away from Brock, looking towards Leaf instead. "I know we don't really know each other but...you're so smart. And Misty, she's so strong. I just...I needed to go. I couldn't be useless. And...it wasn't just that. Ash, you know what he's like, Brock." Her eyes flickered to him for a moment before she turned her attention back to Leaf. "He won't always save himself, but he'll always save someone else."

Leaf was a bit stunned to know that she was a small part of why Dawn went into such a dangerous situation, but she was more amused that this ten-year-old had Ash figured out so easily. She laughed and said, "Dawn, you're easily one of the bravest girls I know. Insightful too. You're a good trainer. A good coordinator."

"How did you..." Dawn trailed off, not sure if she wanted to know how Leaf knew that she was a coordinator. The older girl just winked at her.

"Dawn—" Brock was still ready to scold, but Leaf came to her rescue.

"She's just doing what she thought was right, don't be too hard on her." Leaf shook her head. "I don't think I've ever met someone so much like Ash that way." She slapped a hand onto the older boy's shoulder. "You need to take a break, or take a step back from worrying so much. It'll make you bald before you're 20."

He reached up and touched his hair, sighing and shaking his head, letting his arms drop. "I...guess you're right. Dawn, you just need to be more careful, okay? Try not to give me a heart attack?"

"I can try, I guess," she laughed, straightening her shoulders.

There was a loud splash, and they all looked up to see Giratina slowly emerging from the water. Ash and Misty partially broke apart from their near bone-crushing hug, though he still had one arm around her waist and she had one over his shoulder. Brock, Dawn and Leaf all hurried over to them, watching the pokemon get up and slowly walk to the shore.

Newton reached them just in time to see Giratina rise from the water. He breathed out as he jumped off of the hover-segway and said, "Did you see where he went?"

"Where who went?" Brock asked him, eyes narrowing with suspicion.

"You didn't see it? Zero got away in an emergency shi—" Newton was cut off as Giratina fell to the ground, shaking everything around them. "Giratina!"

Pikachu made it over to the pokemon first, Piplup not far behind him. The two looked around, sniffing and poking lightly. Pikachu looked at Ash with horrified eyes, and he felt his stomach drop.

"We were too late," Newton muttered.

...

Ash heard Newton's words, but something didn't make sense to him. The other pokemon from the forest started appearing, hurrying over to see Giratina, maybe to mourn him. For Ash, it was a different story. The pokemon didn't feel dead at all.

He let go of Misty, running forward without much of a thought. He touched the gold metal before letting his hand rest on Giratina's skin – still strange to the touch, almost like solid air. "He's not dead, but he's not far from it. Maybe..." Could he heal Giratina? He didn't know. This wasn't poison like with Misty, but it wasn't a clear wound like when he healed Palkia or even his own injuries.

"No." Shaymin's voice startled him. He looked over his shoulder and saw the small pokemon far too close for comfort. He took a few steps back, staring at her suspiciously. "I can do this. A whole lot of things will get mad at me if I let you kill yourself."

"Huh?"

Shaymin flew up and landed on Giratina. Ash took a few steps back as green light surrounded Shaymin, spreading across Giratina and lighting up the entire valley. The others cringed away behind him, but Ash kept staring in awe.

"Aromatherapy. It heals almost anything." Ash heard Newton speak, but the specifics didn't matter. This wouldn't make up for what Shaymin did, but if she could help Giratina, Ash might not set Chimchar on her once all was said and done.

The light revealed other pokemon surrounding them, Stantler, Sentret, Furret and so much more

Giratina moved, his eyes opening as he slowly stood up, pushing himself off of the ground, and all Ash could do was try not to cry in relief over this too because it was all too much and now everything was okay. He couldn't help but smile when Giratina looked at Shaymin, who flew back away and hid behind Dawn. Giratina spoke in high coos and clicks, and whatever he was saying made Shaymin's ears droop.

"Okay, okay, but Arceus said—." Giratina cut Shaymin off again. "Okay. I won't do it again. Promise."

Realizing that Giratina was *scolding* Shaymin made Ash laugh. He walked towards the massive, rather fearsome looking creature, putting a hand on one of his legs. Giratina looked down at him, tilting his head curiously. "I'm glad you're okay. Everyone here is." He motioned to all the pokemon around him. Pikachu nodded his head, jumping up and climbing up Giratina until he was by his head, patting the crest. The other pokemon around all started making sounds of approval and relief.

Ash could hear Newton explaining how obvious it was that pokemon would know what was at stake with Giratina, but he didn't pay attention to him. Words didn't mean all that much. Instead, he kept his hand on the pokemon's leg, smiling up at him. He didn't say anything, but he trust to push the thought or feeling to the legendary pokemon, though he wasn't entirely sure how that world.

'You're not alone. You never have been.' That was the message that he was trying to sent, and from the way Giratina looked around, and then down at him with an actual smile let Ash know that he understood.

The peace was shattered by an explosion from the water. Ash whipped around as a smaller machine came out of it, hovering in the air with drops of water falling off of it onimously. He felt his heart drop as he remembered Newton's earlier quesitons that he all but ignored.

Zero was still alive.

## Distortion

Zero's small aircraft hovered over the water, but they could hear the creaks and gears as it twisted and changed. Leaf narrowed her eyes, pushing her hat up slightly and asked, "Is it just me or that kind look like Giratina?"

Ash mimicked her expression, even going as far as to push his own hat up so that more light could reach his eyes in the darkness. He tilted his head with confusion and asked, "What is he—." Ash threw his hands up over his eyes as a brilliant sphere of pulsing, pale blue light appeared. Through his finger tips, he could see the sphere hovering before it flew at them violently. Giratina whipped around, with a vicious cry, an identical orb generating in his mouth before it went flying through the air.

The two orbs crashed into one another, the light swirling for a moment before it exploded. The shockwave sent them all flying to the ground, landing in a confusing pile of tangled limbs.

"Pikapi!" Haven been protected from the shockwave by Giratina, Pikachu did not appreciate the fact that his trainer was hurt again. He jumped down electricity surrounding him as he unleashed a powerful Thunderbolt. It slammed into the ship, but didn't do much.

Instead, the ship took off towards the sky, doing a loop in the air before a portal appeared in front of it. The ship flew through, and everything went still and silent again.

"What just happened?" Dawn squeaked out as she pushed herself up, dark blue eyes wide as she tilted her head with confusion.

"He's gone to the Reverse World," Newton growled as he stood up, face twisted in anger. "That machine, it was designed to copy Giratina's ability to get there, but it probably copied all of his other abilities too. There's no telling what damage he could cause there!"

Almost like an answer to that statement, the water in front of them exploded and they all would have ended up on the ground, completely soaked if Giratina hadn't blocked the attack. The pokemon cried out angrily, and Ash looked up just as it lowered its head down. His red eyes look towards Ash, and the boy instantly knew what Giratina wanted, because it was what he wanted too.

Ash took a step forward, but was stopped by someone grabbing his arm. He looked around towards Misty, her eyes filled with worry. "You don't have to." She didn't clarify what it was that he didn't have to do, but Ash knew what she was talking about.

He stared at her for a moment, contemplative before he shook his head, taking his arm away from her grasp and then squeezing her hand reassuringly. "I know, but I want to." His smile faded, a once-rare seriousness that was becoming all-too familiar creeping up on him. "Whatever happens there happens here, so get ready to fight."

Misty appeared thoughtful, before she nodded her head and squeezed his hand back. "We got this. Don't die, or I'll kill you."

He snorted with amusement and let go of her hand. "I promise nothing." He turned to Giratina, who was still waiting patiently, which was slightly surprising since the Reverse World was his home and responsibility. Ash nodded at Pikachu, who jumped up onto his shoulder. He climbed up onto Giratina's head.

"Where are you going?" Dawn called up to him, though Ash didn't answer. Instead, he held on

tightly as Giratina took off into the air flying up towards the glacier and creating a new portal.

“I'm coming too!” Shaymin landed not far from him, holding on just as tightly as Giratina flew through the portal. Ash didn't have it in him to argue, and as much as he disliked Shaymin, he couldn't deny that having the help of another legendary pokemon might actually be a good thing.

The Reverse World was cloaked in the poisonous clouds when they flew in, though as Giratina approached, it all dispersed, as if unable to touch the legendary pokemon without being destroyed. Maybe that was exactly what happened, but Ash didn't have time to focus on that. His eyes locked onto Zero's ship flying around, watching it zigzag around the tall columns of land and ice. He gasped as the wings of the small ship started slicing through some of the massive shards of ice. He wasn't sure what that would do to their world, but it couldn't be good in any way. He watched another completely shatter, a massive chunk falling down.

Giratina cried out in anger and flew towards it. Ash winced, throwing his hand up over his face as they flew through a storm of sharp shards, grimacing a bit from the cuts that it caused. He yelped and jerked back just as a large piece of ice fell in front of him, nearly taking off his head, though Giratina didn't seem to notice or care. He sighed with relief, his hand resting on the ice. It was strange to touch, because it was so cold and ice was one of the things that he couldn't normally sense, it wasn't actually alive, but the ice here was. He looked around as Zero continued to smash and shatter the ice columns.

“Whatever's going to happen at home, they're going to need more help,” Ash said to Pikachu, because if a small bubble popping could cause an explosion, he didn't want to see what this was going to do. He wasn't aware of the blood he left behind on the ice shard, and he wasn't aware of it glowing for a moment before it slid off of Giratina's back and fell.

Ash also had absolutely no way of knowing that something else heard him, awaking for the first time in many, many years.

...

Misty loved fireworks. She loved watching the shapes and the colours, she loved the excitement that most people had when they were watching them, she loved seeing them with friends, and she also loved the fact that something so beautiful and amazing was created by simple explosions.

Fireworks were the first thing she thought of when she heard the cracking. It was much too loud to be gunfire, though maybe some of the veterans who fought in the Kanto Wars would disagree with her. Whatever the case, in this scenario, she did not associate it with anything good.

They all looked around, straining in the darkness to see exactly what was going on before the ground started to shake violently beneath their feet.

“An earthquake?” Brock cried out, grabbing Dawn's shoulders to keep her upright. The girl smiled in thanks, sticking close to him, though she would never admit that it was out of fear.

Misty looked down as the water suddenly touched her sneakers. She frowned in confusion, able to clearly see the waterlevel rising, and took a few steps back. Beside her, Leaf let out a gasp that was so horrifying, that the redhead actually looked up to make sure she was okay.

Though Misty could barely see her in the dim moonlight, she could still see that Leaf was suddenly terrified. “The glacier! It's moving!”

Misty looked towards the mountains that surrounded the walls of ice, and the rising water suddenly

made sense. Her heart dropped and she took a few more steps back. It started ripping at the sides of the mountains, sending rocks and trees down into the lake and shore below.

“This is Zero's doing,” Newton growled angrily.

“You don't say?” Leaf snapped, and Misty was glad because what did it matter if Zero was doing this? There was a massive wall of ice creeping towards them. She told Ash that they could take care of this world, but fighting against a wall of ice?

“What do we do?” Brock asked Newton without looking in his direction.

“I don't know.”

“We fight!” Misty looked around at Dawn, who stormed up to the water's edge, her eyes fixed on the glacier and more determined than anything she had seen in a while. She tossed two pokeballs up into the air, releasing her tiny Buneary and Swinub.

“Buneary, Swinub, use Ice Beam and Ice Shard on the lake!” She pointed at the water, and her pokemon were quick to follow her command, freezing the lake where their attacks touched.

“Oh! Of course!” Misty threw her own pokeballs into the air, releasing Gyarados and Spheal. “Use Ice Aurora Beam and Ice Beam!” They followed the lead of the other two pokemon, freezing the lake.

More and more wild pokemon began to show up, and any that could use an ice-based attack did. Snover, Abomasnow, Frolass, Bidroof, Bibarel, and even an Aagron were helping.

“Come on guys,” Misty muttered, more to herself than anything else. “We just need to slow it down to give them a chance to stop this.” She wasn't the type to pray to legendary pokemon, but she was hoping against all hope that Ash and Pikachu would be able to stop this.

...

Zero's ship finally stopped moving, hovering in front of a rippling portal that showed what was going on in the real world. Ash could clearly see the glacier starting to move, and knew that they had to do something to stop it. Their friends were back there, and as strong as they were, he really didn't expect them to beat a glacier.

Instead of shadowing Zero and trying to minimize the damage without being seen, Giratina went on the attack, launching a powerful Dragon Rage attack that slammed into the small ship. Ash cheered the pokemon on, especially as Shaymin adding her own attack in. Surely there was no way he could withstand two powerful pokemon.

Ash gaped in shock when the ship streaked towards them without a bit of damage on it. Giratina cried out angrily and shot forward, slamming into the ship to try and force it into one of the rock columns.

Pikachu cried out in surprise as he pitched off Ash's shoulder. The boy reacted without thinking, letting go of Giratina to grab his partner, flipping forward and slamming into the metal of the ship. He reacted quickly, grabbing onto the grooves to keep himself on it. From this angle, he could only watch as Zero managed to somehow overpower Giratina, flying forward and slamming the legendary pokemon into a column of ice.

“Giratina!” he yelled, watching as Zero created his own Dragon Rage attack, attempting to hit the legendary pokemon at a point-blank range. Relief rushed through him when Giratina vanished,

appearing above them and attacking. Sure, he was on the ship too, but Ash honestly didn't care at that point of time.

“Hey, hold on!” Shaymin yelled at him, firing her Energy Balls at the window of the ship. “And you, freak on the inside! Why don't you come out here and fight!”

“Come out and—.” Ash yelled as the ship suddenly lurched up. Just as his hand slipped from the grove he was holding onto, he will yet another barrier to appear around him, shocks of discomfort spiralling up his ankles as he slammed into it. He twisted around, holding onto the ship with a bit more comfort in the knowledge that he probably wouldn't fly off again. Instead, he slowly started making his way towards the windshield.

Giratina appeared in front of them again, and two Dragon Rage attacks slammed into one another violently, the explosion nearly twice as big as the one they experienced in the real world. Pikachu cried out and Ash grunted as Zero's ship flipped over midair before correcting itself, and more of the ice columns shattered.

Ash held up his hand, and the ice shards melted before they could reach him. He looked at his own hand with confusion before he realized something. Flipping around and trying desperately to hold on to Zero's ship, the obvious that he had been ignoring this whole time finally came to him. The aura was so strong and powerful in this world that it was almost overwhelming, so he was shunning a lot of it, much like he tried to do when he was at the Tree of Beginning. Aura was powerful, he knew that so much more than most because they couldn't experience how overwhelming it could be.

It didn't have to be that way though. He could control it to a point, but only when he truly stopped fighting against it.

Face screwed up with determination, Ash stopped shunning the energy around him and was almost blinded by the sheer light that assaulted his eyes, a light he couldn't even escaped if he closed them. He didn't need to see though, all he needed to do was feel.

Ash reached out, and to anyone else, it might have looked like he was grasping onto thin air, but in his point of view, he knew that his fingers were physically wrapping around some of the energy flowing around them.

“Pikapi!” Pikachu yelled at him, holding on to his back tightly.

“It'll be okay, just hold on!” He felt Pikachu's tiny claws dig into him more, and then he pulled. The energy followed his movement, and he slammed it down onto the windshield below him, not quick enough to block the glass that shattered and flew in every direction. He grimaced at the stinging pain from the thin cut on his cheek, but persisted. With a grunt and a heave, Ash pulled himself and Pikachu up, leaning over where the windshield used to be and meeting a pair of shocked and incredibly angry golden eyes.

“Hi.”

...

Leaf would never admit it, but he had always hated horror movies. Even as a kid, she didn't like the scary shows that were aimed at her age group. Despite her refusal to admit how much they frightened her, Gary and Ash managed to figure out her fear and that, in combination with her stubbornness, led her to watching many things that gave her nightmares for weeks after.

She was starting to realize though that the true horrors weren't murderers or vengeful spirits, but rather the things that could happen in life without warning. The glacier that was slowly moving towards them, though slow moving and not alive at all, was easily one of the most horrifying things that she had ever seen. Sure, Leaf had been afraid for Misty, but this was different. If they (or Ash) couldn't stop the glacier, it would not only kill them, but a lot of other people. Who knows what would happen after that, with Zero in the Reverse World.

Though Leaf had only been around Ash and his friends for a little over a day, she already figured out where his stress and his tension came from. If this was the type of thing he was expected to do, and on a regular basis by how wary he seemed, she couldn't blame him. Her mind was running a mile a minute, trying to figure out what they could do to slow it down.

The ice on the lake cracked with what sounded like canon-fire as the glacier surged forward. She heard Misty curse beside her, but all she could do was stare. She was a smart girl (though always second to Gary Oak, as he thrived in pointing out), but the mystery of how to stop a glacier was beyond her.

"It's no use, it's not stopping!" Brock cried out, frustration riddling his voice as his fist shook. Leaf decided that he needed as much of a break as Ash did. He was clearly taking too much onto his shoulders as the eldest of the group.

"It's going to crush the Flower Garden if we don't stop it!" Dawn added, stomping her foot on the ground. Her words and her actions were so innocent, so child-like in a way that it almost made Leaf smile. In another situation, it probably would have.

"That's the least of our problems," Newton explained to her in a no-nonsense tone. "There are towns down this valley. The glacier will crush them and as it keeps melting, flood everything else downhill from here. They're all doomed to be destroyed."

Dawn looked like someone had punched a Poochyena in front of her, and Misty put a comforting hand on her shoulder. The redhead glared fiercely at Newton. "Well that's not helping us at all." Her eyes flitted to the glacier again, narrowing slightly. "Maybe we could...melt it?"

"And flood everything?" Newton sounded appalled. "Why would you—."

"It wouldn't flood if we made our own wall of ice to block it," Leaf interrupted, but then she shook her head. "Even with all these pokemon, we couldn't do it fast enough."

"So we just stand here and let it crush us?" Misty's cheeks turned red with frustration, and Leaf decided then and there that all of them needed an actual break.

The ground started to shake beneath their feet, and she actually groaned in annoyance. "What now?"

"Maybe the ground will just open up and swallow us hole," Brock grumbled bitterly, and the three girls stared at him for a moment, completely ignoring the shaking ground beneath them. He realized that they were staring at him, sighed and said, "Sorry, that was morbid."

"What the..." Newton trailed off, focusing on something up on the outline of the mountain. They all followed his gaze, watching as a massive figure appeared above them, lights flickering down the center of it.

Misty shifted suddenly, her expression becoming uncomfortable as she asked, "Is that Regi...um...well one of them?"



“Regigigas,” Brock answered, his eyes going wide. The shaking came to a stop when it stopped moving, before it yelled loudly and held out its arms. The shaking started again as an entire herd of Mamoswine stormed down the cliffside, dwarfed by the sheer size of Regigigas. The shaking became worse as the legendary pokemon started to walk as well.

“There's more over there!” Dawn called out, pointing at the other side of the valley where more Mamoswine stormed down the hill.

“What's...going on?” Leaf asked unsurely, dusty eyes flickering from one incline to the next and back to the glacier.

“I don't know,” Brock answered her honestly. She wasn't really expecting an answer, so all she could do was hold her breath and wait in anticipation as the pokemon charged towards the glacier. Regigigas led the way, pushing against the glacier along with the Mamoswine, actually slowing down its movement.

“Gyarados!” Misty called out to her pokemon after a minute of stunned silence. “Get over there and help push. If the ice under their feet starts to break, freeze it again!”

“You guys watch their feet too!” Dawn urged her own pokemon.

....

Zero was angry. Ash didn't even have to look at him to know that. He ignored Zero's stuttering yells, rolling so that he landed right in front of the young man, kneeling where the windshield used to be, and grabbing the steering. He jerked the ship out of the way before Zero could truly clue in to what he was doing, giving Giratina the chance to attack.

“You stupid child!” He raged, his pupils narrowing. “You don't know what you've done!” He grabbed the controls back, fighting Ash for them. The ship jerked wildly back and fourth, spinning around so quickly that Ash was sure he was going to puke.

“Pikapi!” Pikachu's cry of warning was a little too late. Though he was jerking Zero's ship around, he couldn't stop the man from firing his weapons. Heat seared his back and he was pushed forward, slamming his head onto the top of the ship as something exploded behind him.

Ash cried out in pain, black dots fluttering across his eyes. He slumped slightly, but still managed to hold himself up.

“Pika!” Pikachu's cheeks sparked and he unleashed a torrent of electricity into the cabin of the ship. Ash didn't know what was going on, but he knew that his partner was absolutely done sitting around.

A loud bang and a high-pitched cry of pain caused Ash to whip around, his bright brown eyes locking onto Giratina's form as the legendary pokemon slammed into one of the ice columns with such a harsh force that it actually made him cringe. He could only watch in horror as Giratina fell, the ice column breaking up and slamming down on top of him.

“Giratina!” He yelled in vain, because there was nothing he could do to help the legendary pokemon.

“You should be worrying about yourself.”

Ash didn't have the chance to truly understand Zero's ominous words before the ship jerked roughly. Only holding on with one hand, and far too distracted to actually have a barrier up to

protect himself, Ash yelled in shock when he was thrown off.

He threw out his arms and the energy around him reached out, like it was grabbing a hold of him and stopping him from slamming into the ice column along Giratina had moments before, less than an inch away. The abrupt stop made him feel like he left his stomach somewhere else, and Pikachu was shaking on his shoulder. His concentration wavered, and he started to fall, physically scrambling to grab onto what was left on the ice column, his hands almost instantly becoming cold and numb as he slid down it. Still, grabbing onto different grooves and willing the aura in that world to slow him, he managed to stop himself from what would have been a deadly crash onto the ground. It was still rough though.

Pain exploded in his right ankle as that foot hit the bottom first, and he fell to the ground, crying out and clutching it. His eyes watering and his breath catching in his throat.

“Pikapi!” Pikachu scrambled off of his shoulder, going down to his ankle and sniffing it. He just lightly touched it and Ash cried out again, jerking it away. Pikachu's ears fell.

“It's okay, it's okay,” Ash breathed out, though he wasn't sure if he was talking to Pikachu, or himself. He took a few more deep breaths and then looked up, watching as Zero forced his partially broken ship through the Reverse World. “Oh Mew, oh Mew, what do we do?” His eyes darted to a moving object in the sky, watching as Shaymin attacked the canons that mimicked Giratina's powerful attacks. The thought made him sicker than the pain already did, but in that moment, Ash realized that Shaymin was the only thing that could stop Zero now.

...

Though their pokemon kept the ice from shattering under the weight of so many heavy creatures, all Brock, Misty, Dawn, Leaf and Newton could do was watch the struggle.

“What's it doing?” Leaf asked suddenly, watching as Regigigas started to glow, and that glow started to spread across the surface of the ice and illuminating the area in a warm yellow light. No one needed to try and answer her though, loud crackling and scraping echoing through the air.

“Is it pushing the glacier back?” Dawn asked, completely flabbergasted at what she was seeing. “How's that possible?”

“Regigigas is a legendary pokemon,” Brock told them simply enough, deciding not to bother with out strange it truly was. He knew that legendary pokemon were very hard to explain to someone who had never met them before, mostly because they could do things that just didn't make sense and almost took a blind leap of faith to trust.

Leaf shifted beside him, and he glanced down at her curiously. She focused on Regigigas, biting her lip before she apparently made up her mind. “Well, lets just hope that whatever he's doing helps whatever Ash is doing.”

That made Brock smile. That was a leap of faith.

...

Ash saw it within all the destruction, something that was wonderful and even though he couldn't explain how it was happening, he could clearly see it happening that that's all that mattered to him. He couldn't explain why one of the shatter ice columns suddenly had a subtly yellow glow to the jagged tips, or how more and more ice was slowly appearing out of nowhere, but it was slowly repairing itself.

He was very proud of the very obvious fact that Zero's ship wasn't working right. He couldn't get the speed to ram apart any of the other ice columns, and he seemed to be having trouble steering it in general. Things like motor skills tended to become a bit sluggish after being electrocuted, Ash knew that first hand.

The sound of shifting rocks and ice suddenly caught his attention. He looked around with alarm, but then froze when he saw Team Rocket and their pokmon trying to move the ice that was holding the unconscious Giratina down.

“Team Rocket?”

“Don't go thinking we're nice guys,” Meowth warned him, flashing his claws, though Ash was very confident it was just for show this time. “We got to help.”

“See, the odds of him,” Jessie pointed at Zero's puttering ship, “helping us are slim to none. We'll take our chances with you, twerp.”

“Yeah, besides we haven't had a very big role in these stories so the author wanted to give us a tiny moment,” Meowth added with a shrug. Everyone just stared at him, but he went back to chipping at the ice with some sort of tool, rather than using his own claws.

Ash looked at James as the man knelt down next to him. He flinched when James' hand made contact with his ankle, and he quickly yanked it back before frowning. Then he reached forward again and pushed Ash's pant leg up just a little bit. “Oh.”

It was a bit strange that Ash was letting someone from Team Rocket actually touch him, but if he had to pick one of the three to actually physically help him, it would have been James. Sometimes he honestly didn't understand how this man became a Team Rocket grunt, but then he would turn around and try to steal Pikachu, so there was that. Right now though, Ash knew that he needed some sort of help. He looked down and felt his stomach drop at the swell and bruising appearing around his ankle. He knew for a fact that it was bad.

“It looks like you fractured it a bit,” James told him. Ash was going to reply but another explosion rippled above them in the air as Shaymin attacked Zero's ship again. Funnily enough, James shifted a bit so that he was blocking Ash from the heatwave as best as he could. “There's nothing we can do about it here, but I can help you walk.”

Ash stared at James, and all he could feel was complete sincerity. There was no double-cross here, not even from Jessie and Meowth, who were still working away at getting Giratina out. Ash's eyes shifted upwards as he watched Zero's ship finally settle over them, a sphere of energy starting to appear, pointing at Giratina.

“Pikachu!”

“Pika!” He pokemon jumped from rock to ice shard to rock again, getting close enough to blast the sphere back into the ship, sending it flying backwards. Zero managed to steady it easily enough this time.

“Get out of my way!” The madman yelled, his voice echoing over an intercom system of sorts. “People like you are what's wrong with our world. You never understand. I bet you think I'm destroying everything, but if anything is destroying this place it's the real world!”

“Talk about your melodramatics,” Meowth mumbled and Ash almost laughed out loud.

“There, look at that toxic cloud!” Ash and James both looked up, seeing the mass of purple smog

exploding and engulfing everything it came across. "Don't you see? This wondrous world is constantly being polluted! Don't you understand, I'm protecting it!" His voice ended with a yell that made his speaker system squeal a bit.

Ash shook his head, focusing on the cloud that was coming much too close to them for comfort. "He doesn't know anything about protecting something." Ash closed his eyes. "Ria, come out here." His pokemon appeared from her pokeball almost immediately, staring at James suspiciously. She too had been the target of Team Rocket time and time again. "He's okay, look at me. We don't have any time. Heal it."

She looked at his ankle, wincing a bit and looking at him with wide eyes. "Rio?"

"We don't have time. Heal it. Just so I can walk a bit."

"Ri."

"Ria!"

She closed her eyes and put her paws over his ankle, and Ash tried not to cringe away from the pain because that would only discourage her. She focused, a blue glow covering her paws and his ankle. Neither of them ever really tried fixing something like this before, and Ash wasn't expecting the pain. He had to bite down on his gloved hand to keep from crying out. He had to give James a bit of credit though. If he thought this was strange, he didn't say a word about it.

"Pikapi!" Pikachu ran back, and Ash opened his eyes just in time to see the poisonous cloud surround them. His ankle was far from fine or any sort of healed, but he grabbed onto Ria anyway, breaking her concentration and holding her to his chest so that she wasn't exposed to as much of the poison. Pikachu knew enough to hold his breath.

"Stop it!" Shaymin's voice suddenly echoed around them, oddly powerful. He flew into the midst of the poisonous cloud and started to absorb it. "No more of this!" She pulled in so much of the toxic fumes that her flowers turned pitch black, the leaf-like fur around it turning grey.

"Seed Flare," Ash mumbled once the air in front of him was clear. He struggled to stand up, accepting James' help to stay up. He took a deep breath and yelled, "Shaymin! Shaymin use Seed Flare to knock Zero back into the real world!"

Zero's ship suddenly jerked back away from Shaymin, most likely having heard Ash. He tried to fly away, but as he did, Jessie and Meowth both let out a cry of triumph. They didn't completely free Giratina, but they got enough off to give the once-again-conscious pokemon some mobility. Giratina jerked around, his golden arms clamping onto the ship as he roared. Zero tried to take off, but Giratina was too strong.

"Shaymin! Hurry!" Ash stumbled forward a bit, grabbing onto a boulder beside him. He nodded his head at James, seeing the way the man's eyes kept darting to his own friends with worry. "I'm okay, get to them before something else goes wrong." Which was bound to happen.

James hesitated, but nodded his head and turned to run to Jessie and Meowth. Ash watched him go, making sure he got there before turning back to Shaymin. The pokemon was glowing a bright green that was almost painful to look at. Everything calmed down for a brief moment before it all exploded with a force like nothing they had seen before now.

Ash grabbed Pikachu and Ria, completely forgetting about the fact that he still couldn't walk on his ankle (Ria hadn't done much to help it in a couple minutes she had). He was thrown backwards,

wincing as something hot and bright blue shot by him, slamming into Zero's ship and sending it spiralling just as the energy sucked back into a vacuum-like portal. Shaymin herself was pulled through, followed by the ship and then Team Rocket. Rocks and ice flew in all directions, freeing Giratina completely.

Ash felt the massive pokemon wrap himself around them and land on the ground, holding them all in place.

....

Misty hated waiting, she hated being helpless, and those were easily the two ways she would describe herself and what she had done during this entire adventure. Now they were waiting once again for something to happen. She was so tense with fear and worry (though she would never admit it), that she was willing to accept any sort of change, good or bad, as long as something happened to break up this waiting.

Almost like something heard her, a shimmer appeared in the sky over the glacier. She narrowed her eyes, staring at it with confusion before it was suddenly like the sky was being ripped open right in front of them.

"That's what I saw before," Leaf spoke up suddenly, straightening her posture. "The first time I saw Shaymin."

"She must have used Seed Flare again," Newton explained as he shifted a bit.

They all watched with baited breath to see what would happen. Zero's massive ship flew through, slamming into the ice and flipping over again and again, the piercing sound of ripping metal echoing around them. Misty watched it for a moment before looking towards the portal. "Come on, Ash. Come on. You got him out already."

It wasn't Ash, but another familiar figure that came through next. Shaymin slammed into the glacier, and though she could withstand losing her Sky Form in the Flower Garden at night, combined with her exhaustion and the cold ice of the glacier, she didn't stand a chance. A yellow glow surrounded her body as she changed back into her normal form and fell towards the ice below.

Dawn ran forward, sliding across the ice and catching Shaymin just in the nick of time. She yelped as she slipped, falling onto the ground and rubbing her back. "Ow."

"Sorry," Shaymin muttered, much to the young girl's surprise.

"Where are Ash and Pikachu?" Misty demanded as she slid over to Dawn's side, glaring fiercely at the grass-type, who actually flinched away from her.

"They must still be there," she looked up towards the disappearing portal almost hesitantly. "I'm sure he's okay though."

"He had better be," the redhead grumbled, more annoying with the fact that they were going to be waiting again. She didn't even care that, technically, their problem with the glacier was still a problem.

"Misty," Leaf said suddenly, looking off towards where Zero's ship landed. "Come with me for a minute."

"Why?"

“Well, so you don't attach a legendary for one thing,” she replied dryly. “And another...well...come on. Bring Gyarados.” She took off in the direction of the downed ship.

That caught her interest, and she was quick to recall her massive pokemon before running after the brunette.

“Do I really wanna know?” Dawn asked Brock as he helped her stand up and regain her balance on the ice.

“No, I really don't think so.”

..

Zero desperately tried to get any system back working, anything at all to recover some sort of data, but he was lost in the darkness and destruction of his ship, with nothing but his own pains and thoughts of failure to go over in his head over and over again.

He closed his eyes, and in an oddly serene voice, muttered, “All of my glorious plans...ruined.” He breathed in and out slowly and calmly.

Then a pair of massive teeth clenched through what was left of the roof of his ship, dripping the metal off. The angry eyes of a Gyarados glared down at him, and Zero wondered if this is how he was going to meet his end: killed by a common pokemon.

Vines suddenly shot down from the whole where the roof once was, and he was ripped out of his safety straps and up into the air, unable to move his arms. He struggled, staring down to see the two teenage girls standing between the Gyarados and the Venusaur, glaring at him fiercely.

No, this was how he was going to meet his metaphorical end, defeated and trapped by a bunch of children. He didn't know if that was better, or worse.

*Sky*

# Into The Sky

## Chapter Notes

I normally don't like leaving notes, but in this case I'll make an exception. I want to thank everyone who read and liked this fic! Seriously, it really means a lot! There's still an Epilogue to come, but this is technically the end of the story.

As well, I never mentioned it here, but I have a tumblr blog dedicated strictly to this series of stories and the universe it takes place in. It includes extra information, like my massive 'essay' on how to become a Pokemon Master here. There are pictures and I'm always open to answer questions. The url is <http://theroadyouchoose.tumblr.com> if anyone's interested.

Some people said that Ash was far too dependent on others, still too much of a child, but in true stubborn fashion, he disagreed fiercely. He was proud of being fairly independent, and really, there was nothing wrong with relying on other people. He didn't see how that made him less of a person or weak. Most trainers travelled alone, but while he would do it if he had to, it sounded awfully lonely to him. It was a choice, not because he was entirely incapable. Though admitted, he would have to live on those dry-food rations available for trainers if it was just him, and that wasn't a fun prospect after being spoiled with Brock's food for over three years.

Those days in the Orange Islands when none of them really knew how to cook (Tracey tried but it didn't always work out) were very dark days indeed.

All that aside, he was all alone with only his pokemon, and instead of feeling like he could do anything, he honestly just wanted to see his mother. Poor Delia Ketchum knew a fair bit about what happened on Shamouti Island; of course she was front and center for when he almost skewered himself on an stalactite created by the out-of-control imagination of a young girl, and there was no way Professor Oak hadn't told her about what occurred at Doctor Young's laboratory, but she was still pretty much out of the know when it came to all the insane things that happened to him. His mother always gave him his freedom, but she could still be scarily protective when she wanted to be.

Getting lost in another world with an ankle that was broken – or at least borderline broken since Ria healed him a little bit – would probably go on her list of things to freak out over, and a part of him wanted that. He was just so tired and sore and just about all the fight he had in him was gone.

Giratina shifted behind him, and Ash opened his eyes to look up. Pikachu and Ria were both still shaking in his arms, even as Giratina moved, stretching out a bit and actually able to fly, though he was still visibly injured. He moved around, letting the top of his head rest level with the cliff they were on. Ash understood what the pokemon wanted, and though he didn't want to move, there was really nothing else they could do. Giratina could get them home, sitting there couldn't.

He put Pikachu and Ria on the ground, grimacing and tearing up in pain as he stood up, limping over to the legendary pokemon and all but falling onto his head.

“Pikapi,” Pikachu muttered sadly as he jumped beside him.

"I'll try to heal it," Ria whispered, her ears pressing against her head. "I'll try as hard as I can."

"Good girl." Ash wasn't sure if he was talking about the fact that she was going to try and heal him, which meant less pain, or if he was saying that because she was still willing to try something that she found too difficult to do. Maybe it was a bit of both.

He focused on the Reverse World as they flew, deciding that he preferred the term Distortion World. There was nothing 'reversed' about this place, it was just different.

They flew up to one of the shattered glaciers, and Giratina started flying around it in circles, looping from the bottom to the top. Ash could only gape in awe at the fact that the entire thing was rebuilding itself. Relief washed through him, because whatever horrible thing this had caused back home would be fixed.

Around and around they went again and again to each and every shattered column, and Ash was feeling a little bit dizzy by the last one. He didn't have quite the sharp pains going up his leg anymore, so that was a bonus.

"Hey, take a break," Ash said to Ria, breaking her concentration. She stared up at him with exhaustion, nodding and climbing into his lap, falling asleep almost instantly. His ankle wasn't fine, but it wasn't nearly as swollen. Badly sprained, maybe, but he was sure it wasn't broken anymore.

Giratina chirped, and Ash looked up to realize that they had flown away from the area they had been in and were in front of something else entirely. Giratina circled it, and Ash could feel the pokemon urging him to look, urging him to understand. Ash could look, but understanding was something else all together.

There were two massive orbs floating in front of him, identical in shape and size, but one was green and the other one was red. They were pressing against one another, cracking and creating dark smoke in both of them. Hovering on opposites sides of those two were two smaller orbs, one blue and one pink. Both of those were glowing brightly, occasionally a streak of energy with flash from one to another.

"What is this?" Ash asked, his eyes narrowing with confusion.

Giratina cooed and nodded his head (with them all on it) upwards. Ash looked up, and blinked with surprise. There was yet another orb, bigger than the others and gold in colour, yet it was so cracked that it looked like the brush of a feather could shatter it, and unlike the other ones, it was moving, slowly creeping towards the other four.

"I don't understand? What are you trying to tell me?" His eyes darted from one orb to the next, trying to make sense of it.

"The Creator." The voice was deep and smooth, startling him entirely. He looked down at Giratina, knowing that it had been him, but the pokemon didn't say anything else. Instead, he turned and flew away.

Ash looked over his shoulder, back at the massive orbs with narrowed eyes. He looked down at Giratina's skin and then said, "Darkrai told me something bad was coming. That things were going to get worse." He felt agreement rise from Giratina, and his stomach dropped. "So I don't have a choice, I have to help." At this, he disagreed. "I don't...understand." Giratina cooed a bit, but he wouldn't give any sort of answer.



Ash felt like he should know what all of this meant. Giratina clearly thought that the words 'The Creator' should help him enough, but it just wasn't ringing any bells.

Giratina created a portal in front of them, and Ash they flew through, Ash couldn't help but feel sick, like he had failed some sort of test.

Passing through the portal on Giratina's back, without the rush of chasing have Zero, wasn't nearly as jarring as just falling through. Everything got dark around him as they left behind the jarring light of the immense aura in the Reverse World, only for the darkness to open up as they reached the end of the portal.

Ash looked around, relieved to see that there was very little damage compared to what it could have been. He leaned over the edge a little bit, laughing when he saw all of his friends standing up the dark sky. It was hard to believe that it was still night after everything that had happened, but in reality it had been maybe two hours tops, and that was mind boggling.

Giratina set down, lowering his head to allow him to get off. Ash started to slid off the side of Giratina's head, when Pikachu and Ria cried out in their own ways for him to stop. Remembering half way down that his ankle probably wasn't healed right, Ash tried to stop the fall, but Giratina's solid-air-like skin was too awkward to really grab a hold of. He didn't know if he yelled or not as he first landed on his feet, but then fell back over.

"Ash!" Misty's familiar, warm aura appeared beside him as she knelt down, putting a hand on his shoulder. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," he mumbled, keeping his face straight as he he tried not to move his leg, praying that he hadn't messed it up again.

"He's really hurt then," Dawn quipped sarcastically from his other side. "A baby over paper cuts, but trying to hide it if it was a missing limb."

"He still does that?" Leaf asked, sitting down in front of him to peer at his leg. She rolled up his pants and winced a bit at how bruised his ankle was. "Ouch, that had to hurt. How did it not break?"

"It did," he said almost sheepishly, wincing a bit as Misty's grip on his shoulder tightened. "Ria was trying to heal it for me."

"Heal?" She tilted her head curiously.

"Aura. Aura can heal if you know how." He shrugged. "I don't really know how, but I try."

Giratina shifted, and everyone looked up at the massive pokemon. He tilted his head slightly, oberseving them before looking at Shaymin and chirping. Though the sound itself was almost friendly, from the way Shaymin cringed back, it was anything but.

She huffed and then scurried towards Ash, who eyed her warily. "I'll fix your leg." She looked affronted at his suspicious expression and added, "What? I can! Or I could leave it and watch you hobble around and really mess it up for good. You should be grateful I'm even giving you the choice!" Giratina chirped angrily. "Oh fine, I'll do it anyway."

"I'll be grateful for a lot of things once this is over," Ash grumbled, his eyes narrowing darkly as Shaymin touched his ankle. He resisted the urge to jerk back, because the little thing wasn't any sort of gentle, but he knew that she wouldn't dare do something else like she had before, not with Giratina watching so closely.

Her body started to glow, just like it had when she was healing Giratina, and Ash had to admit, as the light washed over his leg, it felt so much better. He actually sighed in relief and leaned back a little bit, moving more of his weight onto his arms behind him.

That's when he noticed the massive pokemon standing not far from them. He blinked and asked, "Who are you?"

"Regi," Regigigas answered. For being such a big pokemon, everyone forgot it existed.

"That's Regigigas. He came to help hold the glacier while you were doing...whatever it was you were doing in the Reverse World," Brock explained, reaching down and helping him stand up.

Ash gingerly put his weight back onto his right leg, and while it still felt a little strange, it didn't hurt anymore. He was almost tempted to thank Shaymin, but there was a little bitter voice in his head that stopped him from doing it. Instead, he looked up at the pokemon curiously.

"I don't...understand...where'd he's come from?"

"That world is connected to ours in weird ways," Shaymin answered, surprisingly. "Everything's got an aura there, right? So yeah, since the ice there is connected to the giant ice cube here, and us legendary pokemon are beyond awesome, Regigigas could kind of hear you asking for help. You bled like a wimp all over the ice, so what makes you...well you ,was put there, and it caught his attention that it was the Chosen One asking for help. So he came to help."

"...So my blood controls legendary pokemon?" Skepticism was a nice way of labelling the obvious emotion on Ash's face.

"Don't be stupid," Shaymin looked positive affronted by the idea. "There's not a thing special about your blood except for the fact that it has your...what do you call it? Three letters?"

"DNA?" Brock supplied.

"Yeah that! It just let him know that it was you, and he decided to be cool and help you out. You're ordinary as hell that way." She scurried over towards the flowers. "Now I wanna get some sleep before the sun comes up." Giratina moved suddenly, and she huffed angrily. "What do you want now?"

Giratina spread his wings, stretching for a moment and nodding at Ash. He took off of the ground, flying up into the night sky.

"Where's he going?" Dawn asked curiously.

"Could he be going after Dialga again?" Leaf wondered, drawing everyone's attention to her.

"Well, Dialga was the one who trapped him in the Reverse World. If I was him, I'd want to get revenge."

"I hope not," Ash shook his head, watching as Giratina vanished into the darkness. Two pokemon that powerful fighting each other would definitely cause more problems than he really wanted to fix at the moment.

The ground shook under them as Regigigas and all of the Mamoswine started to retreat up from the hills they originally came. Ash watched the pokemon walk away, more than a little curious. It came to help even if it wasn't originally involved with this whole mess, apparently because he asked. Maybe this whole Chosen One thing wasn't quite as much of a one-person burden as he originally thought, not if they were willing to help him.

“We all need to get a few hours of sleep,” Brock spoke up suddenly, startling Ash a little bit. “It’s really late, but I don’t think anyone needs to stand guard. Not now.”

“Where’s Zero?” The raven-haired boy looked around with confusion, just realizing that the person who caused so many problems wasn’t anywhere in sight.

Leaf and Misty both smirked, exchanging amused expressions. Leaf reached up, fixing her hat a little before she said, “Gyarados and Venusaur are watching him, and Newton’s watching them. We’re good.”

Ash eyed them both warily, deciding that he didn’t want to know. Their gleeful faces were almost more terrifying than anything else he had encountered that day.

Nobody protested Brock’s idea of sleep. They all moved sluggishly now that the danger was gone, getting out their sleeping bags and haphazardly throwing them onto the ground. Ash looked over as Misty put hers right beside his, frowning a little bit as he watched her climb in and yawn.

Misty shifted, getting comfortable before cracking her eyes open to stare back at him. She didn’t seem particularly surprised to see him staring, but still she asked, “What?”

“You’re okay, right?” He didn’t think he could hide the worry in his voice. “Like, the poison’s gone and it hasn’t done...anything weird...as it?”

“No weirdness,” Misty assured him, yawning again. “I’m just tired, a bit sore.” She frowned, reaching out and pulling his hat off of his head. Her eyes then moved up to where Pikachu and Ria were gathering some wood to make a fire, which Chimchar set ablaze. It was funny, none of them had even noticed that Ash’s pokemon had gone out of the way to help. “They got us covered, so we all need some sleep.”

Ash shook his head, reaching out and taking her hand into his own. Misty didn’t pull away or question him, just intertwining her fingers with his and drifting off to sleep like that. Maybe she needed to be able to feel that he was still there and okay, just he did.

....

Morning came far too soon in Ash’s opinion. To be fair, the sun had obviously risen only about an hour before he woke up, and both Brock and Leaf apparently got up with it.

When Ash woke up, Misty was still holding his hand, which was definitely a little strange but not in a bad way. Dawn was still sleeping, curled up in her own sleeping bag not far from them. The pokemon that happened to be out of their pokeballs were all snuggled together, some awake and watching what was going on around them while others snoozed. He couldn’t see Newton, so he assumed that the man was still taking care of Zero. Brock and Leaf were kneeling in front of a large bag, both with dirt on their clothes and looking at Leaf’s tablet.

He didn’t want to wake Misty up, but he needed to move. The redhead blinked open her eyes, smiling at him as he let go of her hand. She yawned and rolled over, though Ash knew she’d get up soon. Once awake, Misty had a hard time getting back to sleep.

He walked towards Brock and Leaf, trying to be as quiet as possible. “What are you guys doing?”

“Collecting the roots that ripped up,” Leaf pointed towards the mess left behind from Zero’s ship crashing. “These ones won’t grow back, so we’re taking some. Graceidea flowers are so rare that we’re hoping some people Professor Oak knows might be able to grow some in labs.” She motioned towards Misty and said, “Look what it did for her. I’ve never seen a natural cure that’s so

effective.”

Ash smiled warmly at Misty, who was sitting up and laughing with Dawn. The younger girl was frantically trying to brush out her tangled hair. He looked at the others and asked, “Need some help?”

“Nah, we’ve got enough. The pokemon here can use it too,” Brock answered. “Might as well leave some for them.”

“Big softie,” Leaf laughed, causing Brock to chuckle along with her. He didn’t try to deny it at all.

Ash looked from one to the other and couldn’t help but smile. Only yesterday they had been suspicious and short with one another, but seeing them laugh and get along made something warm inside of Ash. It was the same feeling when he watched Misty and Dawn interact, different portions of his past coming together to form a present that he happened to like a lot.

“Just like Ash,” her words interrupted Ash’s musings. “Seriously, when we were little, he saw a baby Pidgey fall out of their nest right outside our classroom window. Ash snuck outside, picked it up, climbed up the tree to put it back, and then got me to open the window to get back inside before the teacher noticed. How’s that for a softie?”

“Leaf!” Ash cried out over Brock’s laughter.

“Pikapi!” Pikachu rushed by him, jumping up onto a boulder. Ria and Piplup eagerly followed him, and all three pokemon thrashed their arms around wildly. Ash tilted his head curiously, walking in their direction to see what it was that they wanted.

Soon, Leaf, Brock, Misty and Dawn were all standing with him, waiting to see exactly what it was the pokemon wanted.

“They’re here,” Shaymin said suddenly, stepping forward to the edge of the Flower Garden with her head turned towards the woods. The bushes rustled, and a group of small creatures appeared.

“A herd of Shaymin!” Dawn exclaimed, clutching her hand over her chest almost as if she was overwhelmed by the sight.

Ash almost felt like he was, but not in the same way. She seemed amazed, but he felt his whole body tense up, taking a step back. A warm hand clasped his own, and he looked over at Misty. She didn’t say anything, just smiled at him encouragingly, squeezing his hand tightly.

They watched the other Shaymin start to smell the flowers, shifting over to their Sky Forms. The Shaymin with them walked forward, before turning around to look at them. “Well, you should be grateful you got the chance to meet me, but it’s time to go now.”

Ash’s eyes narrowed. “I’m never going to forgive you for what you did.” It might have been petty of him, but he just couldn’t find it within himself to accept what she had done. Not to Misty, not to him, not to anyone.

“We were told that the Chosen One would always help us whenever we needed it, no matter what.” She turned to scurry away, but stopped mid-step. “At least I think. I dunno, it was a really, really, really long time ago since he left. Besides, I wasn’t gonna let her die. I could have healed her.”

Ash’s eyes narrowed, and this time Misty tensed up beside him. Neither one of them got the opportunity to move though, as a small figure marched out in front of them. Ash watched as Ria stormed over to Shaymin and the two stared at one another for a tense moment. Shaymin opened

her mouth to say something, and Ria punched her in the face, sending her flying back into the flowers.

“Ria!” Dawn scolded sternly. She looked at Ash, hoping to see him scold her because that wasn't a good thing to do no matter the circumstances, but Ash was too busy leaning on Misty to keep himself from falling over as he tried and failed miserably to keep his laughter silent. For what it was worth, Misty's shoulders were shaking along with his. Dawn just sighed and shook her head.

Ria walked back over, and Pikachu shook his head with amusement as she hopped back onto the rock. He patted her shoulder and she just smiled proudly.

“You know, I guess I deserved that,” Shaymin admitted from the grass, startling them all. “You know...I am grateful to all of you too.”

“Huh?”

Shaymin watched the others fly up into the air, and Ash swore he could see tears in her eyes. “They could have been hurt so badly without me. It's my job to protect them, and I would do anything to do it. So thank you. All of you.” She glanced over at Ash. “You don't have to like me, I understand. It's okay.” She walked forward, light surrounding her body as she changed shape one again.

Soaring up into the sky, the others followed along after her, a wind kicking up as they flew in circles, the flower petals dancing in the air around them.

“It's beautiful,” Dawn said happily.

“Well, you're definitely not wrong,” Leaf conceded, though there was a bit of hesitance to her voice.

Ash couldn't help but be a little jealous of Dawn. She wasn't that much younger than them, but it was so obvious that she was much more willing to forgive and move on than any of the rest of them were. If anything, it took out the beauty from the moment.

The Shaymin flew over their heads, and everyone turned to watch them fly away, heading towards the early morning sun and disappearing in the distance.

“I guess, it's time to go,” Brock finally declared when they were finally out of sight.

“Time to go back home,” Leaf said almost wistfully, holding her hat to her head so the wind wouldn't toss it away along with all the petals dancing around them. “I haven't had an adventure like this in...well I never had one before.” She turned around and the smile on her face was filled with a warmth that Ash could only remember from when they were really young. “Thank you. I'm glad I got to meet you all, or remeet you.” The last remark was directed at Ash himself.

“You know, I'm leaving in a few days for Kanto,” Misty spoke up, still holding Ash's hand. “You could always stick around and we could go back together.”

Surprise marred Leaf's face, her eyes going surprisingly wide. She looked around at everyone else, Brock smiling and Dawn nodding eagerly, before she smiled again. “I think I'd like that.” There was a bit of shy embarrassment on her face, and she said, “I'll go get Gyarados for you so we can leave. I'm sure Newton will be able to wrangle Zero.”

“Newton called the police in the nearest town. They're already on the way. I'm sure he can handle them,” Brock added. Leaf nodded, taking the pokeball Misty offered and hurried away.

“Gary and I were her only friends,” Ash said to Misty. “So you don't know what that actually means to her.”

“I do,” Misty insisted. “Trust me on that. You know, despite everything, making a new friend was worth it.”

It was, Ash silently agreed. He would never want her to get harmed like that again, but along with meeting Leaf again, he felt lighter, like he was carrying less on his shoulders. Giratina was persistent about the fact that Ash did have the ability to make his own choices, and just that possibility made all the difference on the world. It was strange, because he wasn't nearly as afraid as he was before.

Looking down at the flowers by their feet, he let go of Misty's hand and picked up some of the discarded ones that had been ripped from the ground, but the flowers themselves were still in tact. “You send fake ones of these to people who you're grateful for, right?”

“Yeah,” Dawn nodded her head.

“I think I'm going to send some of these real ones to my mom,” he admitted, picking up a few more. Dawn smiled brilliantly and quickly started picking some up herself, Brock doing the same a moment later.

Misty grabbed a couple and put them with Ash's. He looked at her curiously and she said, “Send them to your mom from both us. She's like a mother to me too.”

He laughed and nodded his head. Pulling one from the haphazardly made bouquet in his hands, he handed one to her.

She raised an eyebrow at him and asked, “Only one? I don't get a bunch too?”

“Nope. Only one.” He laughed at her as she punched him lightly. He grabbed her fist to prevent her from playfully hitting him again (he knew what it was like when she actually wanted to hurt someone, and this definitely wasn't it, not even close). “You know I'm grateful I met you, right?”

Her cheeks turned pink and she smiled at him, nodding her head. She held the flower he gave her in one hand, taking a hold of his free one with the other as they watched Leaf join Brock and Dawn in picking some of the flowers.

Ash wasn't as sure about his future as he used to be, but moments like this, with his friends and pokémon so free and happy, made any struggle worth it. He knew that he would always step up to defend them, because it was his choice before anything else, and that they would do the same for him.

That was something he would always be grateful for.

**-The End-**

**Sky**



## Epilogue

Zero sat in the back of the black SUV, staring at the tinted window that he couldn't even actually see through. He was lost in thought about all of his plans, and the failure that became of them.

His hands curled into fists, his bruised wrists pressing against the edge of his too-tight handcuffs. He hated Newton, he hated Giratina, but more importantly, he hated those children that stopped him. Specifically that strange boy with the black hair and the Pikachu. Why did Giratina trust him so much? No, not just Giratina, but that Shaymin seemed to as well. Why was that?

The SUV came to a sudden stop, and he jerked in his seat. Though he couldn't see into the front (they could still see him in the back through that stupid one-way window), he could hear a door opening and closing, and the sound of concerned, angry voices. It didn't really matter to him though.

What did concern him was the distinct gunshots from just outside. He heard screaming and yelling as gunfire was traded, until everything went silent.

He jerked back as the door flew open, revealing a rather young woman with twisted blonde hair hidden beneath a red and white cap. She regarded him coldly before asking, "You go by the name Zero, correct?"

"My name *is* Zero," he snapped back at her, jerking his head to get his white fringe out of his golden eyes.

She sighed and put a hand on her hip. "Whatever works. I'll get straight to the point. My boss has been watching you for a while, and he is very interested in your machine that was destroyed back there."

"Well it's destroyed, like you said." He didn't want anyone else to taint the Reverse World. It was so pure, and it was *his*. "I won't help you rebuild it to get back there."

"Back—oh no, you misunderstand, we have no interest in the Reverse World. It's a world of nothingness. We like this one." A smirk spread across her lips. "So, here's the deal, you give us your blueprints specifically for the part that can scan pokemon and copy their abilities, and you get to go free."

"If I don't?"

Her smirk turned into something that even made him feel a little sick. He recognized the sadistic pleasure behind it. After all, they say that psychopaths and serial killers are often the best profilers. The blonde nodded her head to someone else, and two men dragged Newton into view, their uniforms containing the same bright red R on it.

"Don't give them anything, Zero!" Newton yelled as he struggled. "It's much too dangerous!"

The woman moved, pulling something out of her belt. Zero winced at the gunshot, the sound so much louder when he wasn't protected by the car. His eyes went wide as he watched Newton fall to the ground, a puddle of red liquid pooling around his head.

"What have you done?!" Zero yelled as he jerked violently. He could wallow in his hatred of Newton, but seeing his mentor unmoving on the ground was something else all together.



"That's your other choice. You give us the blueprints that we *know* still exist, or you end up like that. I know he's the original creator, he'd be so much for valuable, but he's gone." She pointed the gun at him. "Don't think I won't do the same to you."

Zero slowly nodded his head, eyes locked onto Newton's still form. "They took my hard drives but my laptop was put in the truck following me. It's all on there."

"Good boy," she said, as if speaking to a small child. She nodded again to someone else, and two other grunts ran off. Zero could hear banging and shouting, and a few moments later, a man came back with his laptop.

"It's on there," Zero assured her.

"Show me." She turned on the laptop and shoved it towards him.

Though Zero's hands were clasped together, he had enough mobility to type in his passwords and sift through his files to show her the blueprints of his machine. "Here, see?"

She eyed it for a moment before nodding and taking the computer. She passed it to another person, dressed with more white, much like herself, rather than the other people milling about in almost completely black suits. "Make sure it gets to the Doctor right away. Understand?"

"Yes ma'am!" The man hurried away and she turned back to face Zero, unlocking his handcuffs and helping him out of the car.

Zero looked around at the slaughter of the police and their pokemon around him. They clearly didn't stand a chance against this group, whoever they were. He'd been too lost in his own work to bother learning who all these different crime organizations popping up these days were.

He heard a click of a gun's safety, and paused in his steps, not bothering to look around at the blonde. "You're going to kill me now, aren't you?"

"Yes. It'll be quite the tragic scene. Everyone underestimated you, you and the corrupt cops that were here to help you. Everyone died in the shootout, even poor, innocent, Doctor Newton Graceland." It was so obvious that she getting enjoyment out of this, her tone left room for nothing but.

"Who are you?"

"Me? You can call me Black Tulip."

There was a bang and a split second later, everything went dark.

**-The End-**

**Sky**

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